

NEW SERIALS COMMENCE THIS WEEK AND NEXT WEEK.

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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"ALAN! IF YOU MARRY MISS CLIFFORD YOU MUST AT LEAST TRY TO MAKE HER HAPPY!" SAID CAPTAIN FANE.

WILFUL, BUT LOVING.

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CHAPTER I.

SOMEWHERE in the midland shires of England, full a hundred miles from the toil and turmoil of our great London, on the outskirts of a little market-town, stands or stood, some years ago, a large, red-brick house, carefully shut in within high walls, which cut off its inhabitants from the scrutiny of the passer-by, and prevented anyone who stood at the windows from seeing anything of the world beyond.

Perhaps you think the house was a prison, or at least a nunnery. It was neither. The red-brick edifice was simply Miss Mace's establishment for young ladies. Beneath those walls damsels of any age, from seven to seventeen, or even older, pursued the thorny road to learning, and were carefully screened from the mild dissipation of the little town of Pennington and its inhabitants. Prosperity had smiled upon Miss Mace. For

twenty miles round her school was known and valued as the best in the neighbourhood. The small white beds in the long, dreary dormitories were rarely empty. Each vacancy was filled up with delightful alacrity, and the worthy principal was reported to be "coining money." This may have been; certainly she had a snug balance at the nearest bank, and could look forward without alarm to the days of old age.

Not that Miss Mace often troubled herself about old age. At fifty-two, with a vigorous constitution, an unimpaired digestion, and a remarkable talent for managing wayward girls, the worthy principal of Palas House may be pardoned for believing she had barely passed her prime.

It was the month of December, within a week of the Christmas holidays. Miss Mace sat alone in her spacious drawing-room, comfortably ensconced in an old-fashioned armchair. She wore her best black silk dress, and lace mittens on her skinny hands.

It was market day at Pennington, and on such occasions Miss Mace was wont to don festive

attire, and seat herself in state ready to receive the parents of pupils past, present and future.

This afternoon her labour had been all in vain—not a creature had called. Maria Mace hated needless extravagance; she looked at the fire and sighed, "What waste of good coal!" She stroked her silk dress sympathetically, as though to console with it on waiving its sweetness on the desert air, and then she drew the one candle a little nearer, and went on industriously with her knitting.

"Six o'clock!" as the chimes of the distant church fell on her ear, "no one will be here to-night. Dear! dear! and half a scuttle of coals gone! What a pity!"

But for once she had reckoned without her host; the front-door bell sounded a tremendous peal, re-echoing through the house.

"Only the postman," decided poor Miss Mace, trying not to let herself hope; "only the post. What an impatient creature he is."

A rap at the drawing-room door, and a servant entered; a housemaid looking nearly as prim as

her mistress. It was perfectly wonderful the primness imparted to anyone by a long residence at Pallas House!

Miss Mace stretched out her hand mechanically for a letter—by the dim light of the one candle something on the waiter really looked like a letter—and received instead a card inscribed with the name of the Earl of St. Clare.

Maria Mace started; she bore most shocks with equanimity—had not even jumped when the widow of a city knight called to ask for a prospectus. But an earl—a real live scion of nobility to enter her drawing-room—it was really too much!

"I said you were at home, ma'am," remarked the servant, "and the gentleman said he wished to see you alone; his business was important."

"Draw down the blinds," gasped Miss Mace. "Light the gas—all three burners, Susan—and put some more coals on the fire. Do be quick, girl, don't keep his lordship waiting like this!"

Visions of titled pupils—of Pallas House being peopled by children of the nobility—danced before her eyes. Small bead-like eyes at the best of times they were, and just now they perfectly glittered with excitement.

Another moment and Susan had ushered in a tall, stately man in deep mourning—a man who had the stamp of aristocracy on every feature, and yet who caused Miss Mace a convulsion of despair. He was so young, twenty-seven at the most; he could have no daughters old enough to benefit by the advantages of her establishment. Then she brightened—he might have sisters!

"Miss Mace," began the stranger, interrogatively, "I think the principal of this establishment?"

"Yes," returned Miss Mace, eagerly. "I am. May I inquire to what I owe the honour of your lordship's visit?"

Considering it was her first attempt at conversing with nobility, she flattered herself she got on remarkably well.

Lord St. Clare hesitated. He rose, went to the door to see that it was securely fastened, returned, and drew his chair a trifle nearer to Miss Mace's.

"My business is of a private and delicate nature. May I ask if we are safe from interruption?"

"Perfectly safe, my lord!" replied the spinster all in a flutter of agitation; "my pupils are engaged at their studies; no visitors are likely to call at such an hour. I am entirely at your service."

He bowed, but was so long in speaking that her curiosity was fairly feverish.

"You have been here a long time," the Earl began at last. "Seventeen or eighteen years I think, Miss Mace?"

"Twenty-two," corrected Maria, feeling just a little diffident at contradicting a nobleman, and yet wishing him to be aware of her full length of tenure of Pallas House. "Twenty-two this very month."

"Ah! and you have lived here yourself all this time; you have never deputed another to take your place?"

"Never!" bridling a little. "I may have absented myself for a week or two occasionally during the holidays for needful change; but then the house has been thus up. I have never for a day or hour delegated my authority as mistress of this establishment."

"Then I can speak to you with all confidence!"

"Certainly."

"Fifteen years ago, this very month, you had a death in the house—a young lady who acted as your English teacher."

It was a sore subject even now. She had not been ungenerous to the poor, friendless governess, but she had never quite forgiven her for presuming to impugn the healthiness of Pallas House by dying there.

"Miss Lynn would have died anywhere," retorted Miss Mace; "she was in a decline, poor thing."

"It was not her death I desired to speak of, but other circumstances. She left, I think, a child?"

"She did."

"Which was kept under your care?"

"Not for nothing," explained Miss Mace, who had one strong point—an unvarying truthfulness. "An old man came to see Miss Lynn on her death-bed, and asked me the lowest possible sum for which I could educate the child. He looked wretchedly poor; his clothes were nearly thread-bare, and he carried an umbrella in rage, so I could not ask him much. I said fifteen pounds a year; and, to do him justice, little as it was it has been regularly paid."

"And you never discovered the old man's name, madam, in all these years?"

"Never," she confessed. "At first I own I was rather curious upon the subject, but the money came so regularly, the whole affair grew so much a matter of course, that for years I have ceased to speculate upon it."

"The old man was my uncle, Miss Mace, my uncle and adopted father, the late Earl of St. Clare."

"What!" cried the school mistress. "He? Why, the parish clerk is better dressed."

"That mean attire was assumed as a disguise. I will explain everything; indeed, I owe it to you to do so, even if I did not need your aid in a matter very near myself."

Miss Mace vowed she was prepared for anything after that shabby old man being a peer.

"The young widow who taught in your school was the late Earl's only child, the Lady Evelyn Dene. At eighteen she eloped from her house with a man her father considered beneath her."

"And he treated her cruelly, I'll be bound," suggested Miss Mace. "Mrs. Lynn looked like a woman whose heart was broken."

"I cannot tell you that. I only know that for years my uncle laboured under the mistake that his daughter had been no wife—that her child was illegitimate. It was for that cause he concealed his identity from you; he could not bear that anyone should know disgrace was the portion of his only child."

He paused and half sighed; evidently the latter part of his story was the most difficult to him.

"Only six months ago my uncle learnt the truth. The person through whom he had been deceived confessed her treachery upon her death-bed, and restored the certificates of Lady Evelyn's marriage, and by her daughter's wish the Earl would have come himself to you only illness stepped in. From that illness he never recovered. His dying charge to me was to come here and tell you this story, and to beg your acceptance of two thousand pounds, as a slight mark of his regret for the miserable pittance he had sent you all these years."

"I am sure I can never thank your uncle enough, or you either, my lord, for your kindness in coming here to bring me the news."

"I have not finished, Miss Mace," said St. Clare, with an awkward laugh. "You will find in the end it is I who shall be your debtor."

"There is nothing I would not be glad to do to assist your lordship's plan. Perhaps you would like to see your cousin?"

"Presently. What is she like?"

"She is nearly eighteen," returned Miss Mace. "Really I do not know how to describe her; she is a timid, shrinking girl, though she has lived here all her life. I know much less of her real character than I know of many pupils who have been with me but one year."

"Ah! and she is a lady?"

"Assuredly."

"Pretty?"

Miss Mace shook her head.

"Her mother was beautiful; Dora is not in the least like her. She is a strange, unsociable girl."

The young man sighed—at least it was more like a groan than a sigh.

"What a description! and she is to be my wife! Think of it, madam! and if you have a woman's heart in your breast, pity me—this girl of whom, even you, after years of close intercourse, can tell me little favourable—this strange, unsociable creature must be my wife, Countess of St. Clare, head of a family, whose women have been noted for their beauty, their grace, and charm. Oh, it is unendurable!"

"But is there no alternative?" asked Miss Mace, touched, as what woman could not have been at this appeal from a young, handsome nobleman.

"Surely, Lord St. Clare, no human power can make you marry my unfortunate pupil since the match is so evidently against your wishes?"

"It is the old story," he said, gloomily. "I cannot dig, to beg I am ashamed. Forgive me for quoting scripture, madam. I have some excuse for anger. I was brought up my uncle's heir; his name was the last in the entail, even had I not deemed myself his nearest in kin, I was so thoroughly the son of his affection that I never doubted all would be mine; and then this story comes, and he heard that his daughter's child was in very deed and truth a lawful scion of the St. Clares."

"You cannot mean that he has made Dora his heiress? Surely he might have divided the property between you?"

"I never wished to rob the girl," said St. Clare, gloomily. "With two estates, a town house, and an income of a hundred thousand pounds, he might surely have made provision for us both."

"And has he not?"

"He has left St. Clare and Riverdene, the mansion in Belgrave and every farthing he possesses to me on condition that I marry his granddaughter."

"And if you refuse?"

"It is hers, absolutely."

Neither of them entered into the other chance that his cousin might refuse the honour offered her; that a little obscure school-girl should refuse to become a countess never crossed their minds; in fact, though St. Clare was as free from vanity as most men, it had never entered his head to ask what would become of the property in such a case. From boyhood upwards women had smiled upon him; no fair face had ever failed to brighten at his compliments; it was hardly likely, then, that he could fail to know his own attractions.

"It is a strange history," said Miss Mace, slowly. "I never heard of such a will; it sounds monstrous. Would it not be possible to speak to?"

He shook his head.

"My uncle was not a very old man, only seventy-four at the time of his death. His intellect was strong and clear; besides, even if the will was disposed of, the results would be the same. Miss Clifford's claim would be nearer than mine."

Miss Mace looked into the fire. She was a very clever woman, and, to quote an expression of her own, could see as far into a post as most people; but she failed to see any escape for the Earl of St. Clare from the alternatives of poverty, or an uncongenial marriage.

"Would you like to see her?"

"I suppose I must. I fear I shall exhaust your patience, but I have yet a favour to ask. Will you provide Miss Clifford with everything suited to an heiress, and see that she reaches St. Clare by Christmas Eve? My uncle's will directs that so soon as he shall have been dead three months his granddaughter is to be received at his castle, and reside there until our marriage."

"The Earl never doubted your consent then?"

"Never once. He knew I had been unused to poverty, and he seems to have been possessed with an idea his granddaughter would be a beauty. Her mother, I have heard, was the loveliest woman in the county. Even I, child as I was at the time of her disappearance, have a faint remembrance of her attractions."

"I fear you will find no resemblance to her in her daughter."

"Then you will kindly arrange the details; my lawyer will wait on you to-morrow to hand you my uncle's legacy; he will also furnish you with whatever sums you deem necessary for the young lady's expenses. And now" (and a strangely bitter smile crossed the young man's face) "I will ask you to introduce me to my future wife!"

Miss Mace rose at once and left the room.

Turned fifty though she was, she felt in quite a glow of excitement at the romance going on under her roof. It read like a chapter out of a novel. Oh! why had not Miss Clifford been beautiful, or even pretty! Why was she such a plain, shrinking creature, whom it was well-nigh impossible a young earl would love!

In the study inspecting the progress of the juniors' lessons, that was where Miss Mace expected to find her half-pupil, but she was not there, and Mademoiselle denied all knowledge of her. In the bedroom, officiating at the *coucher* of the tiniest pupils! no, a stout housemaid was fulfilling that task.

Miss Mace was getting into despair; she had been away fully ten minutes. Lord St. Clare would surely think his cousin needed a great deal of preparation to fit her for his presence.

Then it came into the principal's head to look into the music-room, a tiny slip on the ground-floor, little used that severe weather, because, having no fireplace, it had been found impossible to warm it sufficiently for human habitation.

The piano being the oldest of the four on the premises, and with many of its notes dumb, mattered little.

The moonlight poured in at the unshuttered window, and disclosed a slight form crouching by the piano; one hand picked out a few melodious chords, and a voice, full and sweet, though a little tremulous, sang an old ballad. In spite of herself, Miss Mace was impressed by the picture.

"That child is music mad," she thought. "I believe she would rather be an opera singer than a countess." Aloud, she called in her sharpest tone, "Dora, what are you doing here!"

Dora started; for the principal herself to appear in scholastic regions at that hour was something remarkable. She felt frightened almost without knowing why, and with the instinct of a creature often blamed she began to defend herself.

"Mademoiselle gave me leave to come, ma'am, and Ann is upstairs with the little ones putting them to bed."

"Mademoiselle was very wrong indeed," said Miss Mace. "Sitting here in the cold! Why your hands must be blue and your feet frozen. Come away at once!"

This consideration for her own comfort was something so new that Dora started far more than she would have done at the scolding she had anticipated. She followed Miss Mace timidly to a small room known as the class-room, where the principal gave her own lessons, and was wont to retire on such occasions as the drawing-room was not used. Miss Mace shut the door, and dragged Dora to the bright fire.

"Warm your hands a little and then come with me; I want you in the drawing-room, to see a visitor."

The drawing-room! Dora opened her eyes. Never since she could remember had her presence been requested there to see a visitor. True she had occasionally assisted in dusting the apartment for some great festival, but never in her life had she been bidden there as a guest.

Miss Mace watched her with suppressed irritation. Why, oh! why was Dora so hopelessly bad-looking! What a poor impression she would convey to the young Earl of the advantages enjoyed at the school; and the principal had never admired her half-pupil, but her decided plainness had never recurred to her so strongly as now.

Some girls look their best at seventeen. Their earliest bloom of womanhood is full of promise, but Dora was not of their type. She looked too big to be a child, too angular, too unformed to be a woman. She was already of middle height, and had probably not stopped growing. Her arms were too long for her plain, tight sleeves, and her country-made boots escaped from her untanned skirt.

Her complexion was that peculiar hue ladies call muddy. Just now, too, the excessive cold had given it a leaden, ashen tinge, and Miss Mace's admonitions to warm herself could not dispel it. Her hands were long and thin, and

almost purple with the cold. Her hair was rough and frizzy, and arranged with so little skill as to make its abundance seem more a deformity than an ornament. She wore a grey stuff dress, warm and comfortable, but deplorably plain and unfitting. It had been made a year ago, and was now considerably outgrown. There was no attempt at ornament—not even a bow of coloured ribbon at the opening of the narrow white collar.

Miss Mace groaned. She would have liked to take the girl into her own bedroom and dress her afresh from her own hoards, just to save the Earl's feelings a little; but, alas! he had already been kept waiting fully twenty minutes. It was impossible to detain him longer. And so, with a resolute effort to make the best of it, Miss Mace took Dora's hand, and led her upstairs.

"Your cousin is waiting for you. I trust, Dora, you will be grateful to him for his kindness in coming all this distance to see you, and invite you to spend the approaching vacation at his house."

But there was a defiant gleam in the girl's eyes. Dora had beautiful eyes, some people said they were her only good feature.

"I don't want to go to his house, Miss Mace. I don't want to see him!"

"I am ashamed of you, after his kindness."

"He has let me alone for nearly eighteen years!" returned the girl. "I think his kindness comes too late to command my gratitude!"

Miss Mace was silent from sheer surprise.

There were times when she would not quite understand Dora Clifford, when the girl seemed beyond her comprehension. This was one. In perfect silence she led the way to the drawing-room door, and held it open for her half-pupil to enter. She herself did not follow her; some subtle instinct told her that, however embarrassing their *l'été-à-tête* might be to the stranger-cousins, it was yet best no other eyes should witness their meeting.

CHAPTER II.

CASTLE ST CLARE was a noble pile, situated in one of the most picturesque parts of Kent; the beautiful grounds extended for miles; the timber was the finest in the county—for centuries the woodman's axe had not been heard on the St. Clare estates; the Dene were not a reckless race. Generous and open-handed as the day, they had never been given to prodigal extravagance, and had often chosen the richest heiress in England for their wives; and so it came about that, generation after generation had increased in wealth and importance, until Lawrence, nineteenth Earl of St. Clare, upon his death-bed would not sacrifice the greatness of his family by dividing his possessions, but he made a will he thought would secure alike the happiness of his grandchild and the prosperity of his race.

Castle St. Clare itself was a stately building of white stone, worn gray by the hand of centuries; it was approached by an avenue of chestnuts; then came spacious pleasure grounds—on one side the grand porticoed entrance, on the other a raised terrace ran the whole length of the house, from which you reached its walks through a long, narrow conservatory, or winter garden, into which all the apartments that side of the Castle opened. There were five—the large and small drawing-rooms, the ball and music-rooms, and a small octagon chamber, known as my lady's boudoir.

For more than thirty years this boudoir had had no lawful owner, since for that space there had been no Countess of St. Clare. The Lady Evelyn Dene had, indeed, made it her favourite resort, but after her flight it fell into disuse, and had only been re-opened and freshly decorated five years before, when the Earl's niece, tired of a London season, came on a long visit to the Castle.

The day after her brother's interview with Miss Mace, she sat there idly toying with some fancy embroidery, a very pretty woman and a very proud one, the wife of an officer in the Guards, and the mother of two charming children. Beatrice Fane paid but little attention to her

work, her thoughts were busy with other things; she was devotedly attached to her brother, and their uncle's will had troubled her sadly.

"What is to become of Alan, Lionel," she asked her husband the moment they were alone. "After that fatal discovery, he cannot keep up the title on his own means; an earl with four hundred a-year, it is absurd."

The Captain played with his moustache. "Miss Clifford may not be so very objectionable," he suggested, with an attempt at hopefulness.

"Lionel, I know she will be odious; beside, there is Blanche, you must know that she and Alan understand each other."

"If they understand each other, Bee, nothing matters, dear," and he bent over his wife with a caress that was very lover-like, coming from a husband of over four years' standing.

"Blanche has her little portion; they will make up eight hundred a-year or so between them; and you know, child, we contrive to be very happy on not much more."

"But we are not an earl and countess!"

"Don't worry, little woman, things'll come right if Blanche is true to Alan; he might get a diplomatic appointment or something to add to his income. Besides, Bee, you forget no one has heard anything of Miss Clifford for fifteen years; she may be dead, poor girl, or married already."

And Bee, albeit by nature the kindest-hearted of women, took up the idea enthusiastically. The orphan girl was dead, nothing had been heard of her for years; they would put up a beautiful marble cross over her grave, and then Blanche and Alan would be happy.

Blanche was her own intimate friend and her husband's now, from the first moment of the young lady coming to reside with her.

Beatrice had thrown her in her brother's way; she had given the two every possible opportunity for falling in love, and into love they had fallen most hopelessly; in fact, their wedding-day had been well-nigh fixed, when Lord St. Clare was seized by the illness which proved fatal, and his extraordinary will had upset everyone's calculations.

Nothing had passed between the young people since. Indeed, they had had no opportunity for explanation. Blanche had been away on a visit at the time of the Earl's death.

"Of course this will make no difference, my darling," wrote Alan. "I will win a fortune for you yet!" and Blanche had written back demurely, begging him to do nothing rash, for her sake—that might mean anything or nothing.

Alan Lord St. Clare had told Miss Mace he would probably marry his cousin. He did not think it necessary to explain—he only meant in the case of his rejection by another lady. Alas! poor fellow, madly as he loved Blanche Delaval, he had little, very little, hope that she would be faithful to him in adversity. A favoured child of fortune—a creature made to be worshipped and admired—what right had he, with his beggarly four hundred a-year to bind her to a promise given when he expected his income to be about two hundred times that sum.

She came in presently and interrupted Beatrice in her reverie. Blanche had been home—she called whenever her youthful guardians were home—just two days, therefore she and the Earl had not yet met. As she entered, dressed with all that taste and elegance could do to enhance her beauty, Bee gave a little sigh.

"What's the matter?"

"Alan will be here to-night."

"That's nothing to sigh about, ma'am."

"Blanche, do be serious."

"I am, I assure you, entirely serious. Why should a devoted sister like you sigh because her brother is expected?"

"It is all so different now. Poor fellow! he must feel this meeting with you so much."

"I think I ought to be the person to feel it most," said Blanche, lightly; "Fate has provided Lord St. Clare with an heiress to console him for my loss; Fate has done nothing at all for me except rob me of my fiancé."

"Blanche, you know Alan will be true to you. Oh, why did not my uncle know of your engagement! Why did you keep it secret?"

"He preferred to"—forgetting to mention

that she had insisted on the secrecy as the sole condition of her acceptance.

"Well, I suppose you will settle things to-night, dear; do be true to yourself."

"Seriously, Bee, do you think it would be right to let Lord St. Clare refuse so much money, and to rob the heiress of her chance of a peerage?"

"I think if you love each other, nothing in the whole world should part you."

"Not even such vulgar considerations as eating and drinking, clothing and shelter! None of which, oh! most romantic friend, can be provided for by love."

She sank down upon the sofa and played with her watch-chain. This lover of Alan Dene's was a tall, majestic creature, with a figure perfect in its lovely development, although she was barely twenty-two. Her face was oval and had a faint pink colour; her hair, a tawny shade of gold, was curled and frizzed upon her forehead, and the rest gathered in a knot at the back of her head. Her lips were ruby, her eyes the brightest shade of hazel, fringed with black lashes.

Everyone admired Blanche Delaval; she had broken more than one honest heart, and her enemies called her an arrant flirt; but Lord St. Clare and his sister had seen nothing of this. Bee's health had been so delicate since Blanche came to live with her, that she had never been the young lady's chaperon, and so knew very little of her manner in general society. She had watched Miss Delaval closely when with her brother, and she believed that the wayward beauty loved him truly; but Miss Fane, who herself made a love-match at twenty, really had very little experience in the arts of such sirens as the tawny-haired beauty opposite her.

"I wonder what she is like?"

"Who?" asked Bee, quietly.

"The heiress—Miss Clifford."

"Don't talk about her, we shall know everything soon; Alan must be here in half-an-hour, I should think."

In less than that time they heard the sound of the dog-cart returning, but, to his sister's surprise, Lord St. Clare went straight to his own room; when he approached the boudoir, it was in the faultless evening attire of the nineteenth century; he shook hands warmly with Captain Fane, kissed his sister tenderly, and then advanced to Blanche. Miss Delaval gave him her hand, formerly she had accorded him something more, but the tall footman had just entered to announce dinner, so doubtless that was why a lover's privileges were denied him.

Dinner seemed an endless meal to at least two of the four who sat at the long, oaken table. Beatrice Fane could hardly control her anxiety, and Alan felt each moment an hour until he had seen Blanche Delaval alone and learned his fate from her own lips. Even Captain Fane found it hard work to keep the ball of conversation rolling, and his ward was the only person who seemed entirely at her ease. Bee hoped her brother would begin to speak as soon as the servant had retired, but he went on discussing politics with the Captain, and so, weary of the long suspense, she gave Blanche the signal to retire, and the gentlemen were left to themselves.

"Well, Alan, how have you sped?" cried Lionel, heartily. "I hope well, for your own sake, and Bee's. She has been in a perfect fever of anxiety, poor child."

"And your ward?"

"Blanche is cast in another mould from my little wife. I never understand what she feels or thinks; but I have been telling Bee, even at the worst, things won't be so bad between you. You can make up eight hundred a-year; we have very little more, and I don't think Bee will tell you she has been very miserable since your uncle gave her to me."

Alan wrung his hand.

"Things could not be much worse, Lionel. Heaven help me, I never meant to count on that poor girl's death—never once—and yet it was a bitter pang to me to find her alive!"

Lionel glanced at a full-length portrait opposite them; it represented Lady Evelyn Dene in the first bloom of her womanhood—lovely, girlish

creature, with a shadowy resemblance to Alan's sister.

"But for your attachment to Blanche I don't think I should pity you, Evelyn Dene's daughter must be rarely beautiful."

"Beautiful!" cried Alan, with a bitter laugh; "wait till you see her."

A great fear came to Lionel.

"Do you mean that she is deformed?"

"She looks like a kitchen-maid or a charity girl—I don't know which."

"Alan! remember you are speaking of your kinswoman!" cried Captain Fane, in honest indignation. "You may not choose to marry her, but you have no right to insult her!"

"It is the simple truth, Fane; the girl is simply unbearable. Tall and angular, she looked all legs and arms; she is afraid to speak above a whisper, and called me sir at every other word. If I had never seen my Blanche it would be hard enough upon me to make such a creature my wife, the mother of my children; but now" (there was an indescribable sadness in his voice), "in place of my bright, beautiful darling, Fate offers me this repulsive, underbred young woman. Oh! it is too much."

"What have you done?"

"I have told the school-mistress the whole state of the case, and the girl will be here next Thursday. There is no occasion for her to know her grandfather's wishes, unless they are to be realised betwixt now and Thursday. I must ask my fate from Blanche."

"And if Blanche refuses?"

"I shall be so desperate, nothing will matter much. If Blanche forsakes me I may as well sacrifice myself; after all, I can leave the young woman at one of the country seats, and live at the other myself. Thank goodness, we should be rich enough to go our separate ways."

"Alan! that is madness—worse; it is cruelty. If you marry Miss Clifford you must at least try to make her happy."

Alan shrugged his shoulders.

"Don't preach, Lionel; it is bad enough as it is."

He rose abruptly and left the room. In the boudoir he found Blanche Delaval alone; Bee had thoughtfully absented herself. The soft rays of the lamp shone full upon his darling, and lit up every charm of her beautiful face. Alan flung himself on the ground at her feet.

"Blanche! which is it to be? Darling, can an old man's chimera part us; but for accidents are this you would be my own. Be true to me, my darling, my heart's best love, and in spite of comparative poverty, we shall be happy."

She shivered just a little; perhaps she felt cold, but she only said in her soft rich voice: "Get up, Alan, I cannot bear to see you there."

He rose and took a place beside her on the sofa, one arm encircled her waist, the other hand played with her tawny hair; gradually she yielded to the pressure of that clasp. Alan strained her to his heart and pressed hot passionate kisses upon her lips and brow.

"My darling," he murmured, "I knew you loved me; I knew whatever happened you would be true to me! Oh! Blanche, how could I doubt your constancy for a moment! Let me hear my happiness from your own lips, my sweet; speak to me, my dearest, and tell me you are still my own."

The room seemed to swim round with Blanche Delaval. She felt as though she had two selves. The one cried out for wealth, was the slave of ambition; the other answered that love was better, said rather be at Alan's side in poverty than share any splendour without him.

She did love Alan—loved him with a fierce, sensations passion; but she loved wealth better. Blanche Delaval was a coquette heart and soul; she was the slave of ambition. Her whole love was Alan's; but, alas! women such as she live for other things than love.

"You know I love you, Alan!"

He kissed her again and again. Worldly-minded, ambitious as she was, it did cross her mind—would life be worth the living for without his love! Then came another, crueller thought—could she not retain his love always, even though she refused to share his poverty?

"I love you, Alan," she murmured, her head still nestling on his breast. "I love you too well to be your ruin."

"You could never be that," he cried wildly. "I will not come between you and your splendid heritage. I will not rob you of the wealth you thought your birthright!"

"I should not value it without you."

"I cannot do it," she continued, with what sounded like a sob in her voice. "Because a few words bound you to me why should I rob you of all power and influence among your fellow-men? You are free—free to marry the heiress, and forget the poor girl who had little but her love to bring you!"

She had loosed herself from his embrace, and almost before he knew her purpose, she had left him alone.

"My darling!" murmured Alan, "my sweet, unselfish darling; but I shall convince her the sacrifice is needless, and that we can be very happy on small means. Blanche and I will have love and a cottage, while my uncle's untrained niece rules as queen at St. Clare and Riverdale. I must go and find Bee; she will make my darling hear reason."

(To be continued.)

DR. DENHAM'S WIFE.

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It was a sweet pale face that looked through the window, the forehead pressed against the pane, the eyes following the form of Dr. Denham retreating through the stormy twilight.

The wind wrapped his cloak about him, but he strode along with a step firm with a certain spirit of undaunted determination. It would not be quite easy to say why that firm step and determined air gave comfort to the owner of that pale sweet face as she watched them.

It was a thin face in which still were lines of youth, if not much bluish and bloom, and in the dark blue eyes beneath their black lashes a lover might have found beauty if the owner, since the day that her first love forsook her, had not refused to listen to another. And yet—if it were not that in the hollows of her heart the memory of that first love lingered—if she had not felt out of her forgiveness for his inconstant youth, that he waited for her in some region where it was always youth—if—if, in short, she could have forgotten him, she might have filled her life afresh with all the joy of loving and being beloved.

For this man who was battling with the wind in the twilight had been battling with her will this half dozen years, sometimes fancying he saw conquest approaching in a moment's irresolution, always experiencing defeat, never giving up hope. She herself regarded Dr. Denham's love for her as an infatuation, feeling that there was nothing in her to deserve such devotion, unaware of the beauty of her soul that looked out of her eyes, and shone through all her life, and always debarred from thinking of the love he offered by recollection of the love of which she had been despoiled.

She had not heard from that lover of her youth for more than a dozen years; she thought, of course, he must be dead; she had lain awake many a night picturing his regret, his grief, the return of his old affection, or else following his soul into that other life which we call death, recalling his beauties, forgetting his errors, disbelieving his sins, adoring his memory, her life ruled by love of a shadow of what was not.

And in the arms of that form now retreating down the avenue rest and shelter and happiness awaited her, and she would have none of them; she would not be unfaithful to her first love; and whenever her heart softened towards Dr. Denham, and ached a little for the comfort of his presence, she reproached herself as a weak and wicked woman; and she felt that she had a right to no better fortune when she looked at the little picture of Allan that she had not given back to him when he left her in the brief passion

kindled by the topaz eyes, the damask blushes, the pulpy lips of Doris Black.

But somehow that little picture of a handsome and immature boy of twenty had ceased to work its old spell upon her. No thrill or heart throb of hers now answered its glance; and she thought bitterly how poor a creature she was that years should so dull emotion in her, and that she would never, anyway, saying even that she cared for him, do such injury to Dr. Denham, noble, heroic, patient soul that he was, as to give him now any portion of a heart that was so incapable of constancy as hers.

Perhaps when he left her that twilight, as she stood against the old Stuart portrait, the fire gliding its frame, but the gloom obliterating its subject, so that she herself looked like a pictured lady in a frame, so still and gentle was she—perhaps when he held both her hands in his a moment, and bending, kissed them as one kisses a sacred object in a shrine, he felt more hope than he had ever allowed himself before, wondering if truly she were not beginning to see that she was holding herself faithful to the shadow of what was not. And all the way along, meeting a snarly tramp, passed by a woman running like a wildcat, he kept saying to himself, "A sweeter woman never drew breath than my son's wife, Amy."

As he turned the corner and was gone, those eyes, still looking after him, observed another form in the gloom, a slouching, ill-favoured outline—that of some tramp who was going round to the end door, and who should not be refused his share, Miss Amy said, as she turned to her servant.

"But it's no use talkin', miss," answered Susan; "you've ben givin' and ben givin' all day, till there ain't barely more than enough for your own dinner. I shan't give the creature a bite. So there! You're not going to starve yourself to feed all the tramps that come to the gate!"

"I shan't starve, Susan."

"No, I don't mean you shall. I shan't neither. I want a mince pie if you don't. I'll give him a hunk of bread and meat, if you like, and he can go along to the next town."

"Susan," said Miss Amy, "bring me that pie." And Susan, who had stood up defiant as a robin on his tail a moment before, brought her article in question at once—for Amy had gone into the kitchen at the sound of the beggar's rap—but brought with it a boss that made Miss Amy feel the impending shadow of a day of reckoning. She went along herself to the door where stood the mendicant, and for a moment confronted him.

"My good man," she was going to say in beginning a little encouraging talk to him.

But she said nothing. She left the pie in his hands and shut and bolted the door, and staggered back to a chair by the fire, and closed her eyes and held her hands over them, as if to shut out the sight she had seen.

"Amy!" the man had cried, and plunged away.

But Susan—old Susan, who had been her maid and her mother's before her, for how many a year!—had seen the face, had heard the voice as well; and after a moment of hesitation she went and knelt by the side of her mistress, and took the pretty head and rested it on her own shoulder and patted the soft dark hair with the touch a mother gives a grieving child.

"There, there!" she murmured. "You was just sayin' you didn't know as you'd anything to be thankful for—and there 'tis. You're shut of him, anyway."

"Oh, Susan!" she shuddered. "I thought this long while he was dead. I'd rather have seen him dead."

"So'd I, of course. And he's about the same—about the same as dead. He's dead to all decency. But I never expected to see Allan a bloated, blue-eyed, rum-sodden beggar in tatters. And less'n fifteen year, too. It don't take long to make a rag out of a man. Well, if this ain't been a day of providence! And that 'tother creature upstairs, too. There, there! I don't cry!"

Miss Amy slowly lifted her head.

"I'm not crying," she said. "I ought to cry

to think that once it would have broken my heart. And that now it's only the regret that one must have to see any poor—human—being—so. I'm not—"

And then the tears came in a flood.

Susan lifted the slender form and laid it on the sofa, and presently she brought a hot cup of tea and made Amy drink it, and wet her handkerchief in Cologne water and wiped her forehead with it, and then put on fresh coal, and shut the shutters, and came back to her.

"Now," said she, "you ain't nothin' but a baby. And Allan ain't nothin' to you. And you don't care anyway. And I'm precious glad, for my part, that the thing happened; for now you see where you be. Bitter medicine's bliter in the mouth, but it clears the blood. You were a settin' up of an old image, and bowing down before it, when there's ben a live man and a live lover waitin' for you, and you might 'a ben Mrs. Dr. Denham, and had the whole place at your feet, and have made happiness to boot for the best man that this earth ain't good enough for him to tread on."

"Oh, hush! Susan, hush! How can Dr. Denham care anything about a woman who has ben holding such a thing as that in her heart!"

"You ain't. You've ben worshippin' a plecter you had in your mind, a sort of shadder in the lookin'-glass. And I've heard say that when a lookin'-glass breaks there's a death in the family. Well, that lookin'-glass is broke, and your shadder in it's dead. You never cared nothin' about that thing. It stands to reason you couldn't. There was a girl loved a boy. Well, the girl's changed to a woman; she's an altogether different person. And the boy she loved—he's ben drowned in rum; he's drowned and dead and pickled in rum. And what's all o' that to you? It's the story of somebody else. Land sakes! I remember you when your pa was alive, and we lived in the other house, the night you went down to the gate with a red rose in your hair—the sweetest, prettiest thing you was, your eyes just like the stars in the skies over you—and you waited, and waited, till the moon went down, and out you crept at last, and I along after you, till you see Allan strollin' down the river-side, with his arm round that Miss Black; and then you turned so quick I'd only time to get into the shadder, and flew for home, like a frightened bird. And he see you see him, and he never came near you from that day to this."

Amy's tears had ceased flowing, and she was gazing great-eyed at the speaker, as if she heard the story of another woman's life.

"I don't know as you was any prettier, no, nor half so pretty, when you was sixteen as you be now at thirty-three; someways you do make me think of a hanging white rose full of dew. Well, as I were sayin', that boy—you heard of it, I heard of it, everybody heard of it—jest went from bad to wuss, and that Doris with him. And you wouldn't believe it; you felt sure he'd come back; he couldn't help it, after all the vows he'd made to you. And you wore the string o' gold beads he give you."

"And when year by year he didn't come back, you said he was dead, and you left off wearin' the beads, but kep' them allus on your bureau with the gold miniature case that had his plecter in it, and now that plecter of his'n's no more'n any other fancy plecter. Well, that feller kep' on his way till he got so, 's the old Squire used to say, 'he didn't care a cuss if the wuss come to better or the better come to wuss.'"

"Folks didn't tell you the half of his goings on, and nobody said nothin' after he'd run through his money and quit the place. He jest buried himself alive in sin and sottishness, and he died to all intence and purposes. Fact is, he never was. You jest made him out o' moonshine. He's gone up in smoke—tobacco smoke and gin fumes. And you—you've come to your senses."

"Sakes alive! if you'd married him! What if you'd married him jest to reform him! You'd 'a ben the dust and ashes you've ben thinkin' he was in all these years you've ben a-picturin' of him as under the sod. Now I know jest how you feel. Something you held by's gone all to

pieces. But by-and-by you'll feel the solid earth under your feet."

Amy lay now with her eyes closed, but two great tears were welling out under the lids.

"You'll feel the solid earth under your feet," continued Susan, "and you'll just cling to it for dear life when you find it, for it'll be six feet of as good red dust and clay as ever trod in shoe-leather. And if you don't leave off cryin' right away, Miss Amy, I'll send for it now to come and give you a quieting potion!"

"Oh, Susan, don't—don't talk so. It's—it's really dreadful!" gasped Amy. "I'm all lost and bewildered. It was bad enough before. But I had my ideal left. And now to find that all these years I've—"

"Yer, you'd better say it. You've made a precious fool of yourself. You need to have the truth set before you boldly, 's one may say. Well, if I didn't love ye, and you didn't know it, I shouldn't deal with you this way."

"Oh, Susan," said Amy, still sobbing gently like the end of a summer shower, "I think you have said enough. But I wish it hadn't happened."

"I'm glad it happened!"

"I'd like to have had something left to be thankful for."

"You've got something."

"I'd like to have had my ideal left to be glad of and give thanks for."

"Yor addicksicks! I ain't got no patience. You've got real comfort to be thankful for; you've got a home, a turkey, and plum-pudding, to say nothin' of nothin' else, and another home you can walk right into any day you say the word, and the love of a good man waitin' for you. And if you can't be thankful for that, you wouldn't be thankful if you was in Heaven. Sakes alive! I 'most forgot that creature upstairs," cried Susan, starting up. "I ought to carry her up sunthin' to eat by this time," she said, stirring the fire. "She said she was goin' to her friends, and was tired, and only wanted sleep. I didn't fairly like to put her on a decent bed," continued Susan, lifting a griddle to inspect the fire. "I guess I'll brile her a chop. Tiptoe up and see if she ain't slep' her sleep out fast, though."

A moment or two later a shriek resounded, and in far less time than she had taken for tiptoeing up, Susan came springing down.

"She ain't there—she ain't there! She's gone!" she cried.

"You don't mean that!"

"I do. She opened the window, and climbed out on the shed, and run away."

"What in the world has she run away for!"

"Heaven knows! I thought I felt a draught, and it was that open window all this blessed afternoon. Took French leave. I'll jest have a lamp, and see what else she's took."

"Oh, she's never taken anything in the world, after all the interest you showed in her, feeding her, promisin' her new shoes and your old cloak," said Amy, following. "What did she look like? I wish I had been here when she came."

"She didn't look noways pertickler. Had her face tied up with the toothache, 'n' I felt for her, like the fool I be. Well," holding the lamp above her grizzled head, on which it cast a ring of light like an aureole—"she's taken me at my word. The cloak's gone. Not my old one—your bestest. Your best boots—they've taken the wings of the morning and flown to the uttermost parts of the earth. It's all my fault a-letting of her in. I wonder she didn't take your silk dress. My gracious, she did! I can't never pay for the damage, if I work it out, in years. Let's see what else," said Susan, in accents of despair. "The gold beads! Serves you out for keepin' 'em hung up by your lookin'-glass. Well, she's feathered her nest. I declare to man, miss, you'd orter have a guardian."

"I don't know but I had," sighed Amy, oblivious of Susan's indignation with her and with herself. "How I used to value those beads! I have kissed them every one," she said, looking up with a shy laugh. "I couldn't tell you of it, Susan, if I cared now. I'm glad they're gone. She's welcome to them. I'm only

sorry she felt obliged to take them. She might have taken the gold miniature case too; I wish she had. At least— Well, we'll charge it all to profit and loss, Susan." And Amy took the case and the scissors downstairs, and prised out the miniature, and laid it on the parlour fire, and sat there in the fire-light watching it curl and shrivel and blacken, and dream over old dreams as she watched, and seeing them fall to their own ash too.

How lonely she was, how desolate! Only fifteen years ago she had been full of hope and joy and youth; her lover had seemed a splendid piece of perfection to her; her happiness in him had been deep and real.

And that girl with the blazing topaz eyes had stolen him from her, had spoiled her life, and had led him on to his ruin. But for Doris Black, and her yellow eyes and her dazzling smile, she would have been now the mistress of a joyous household; on the other side of the hearth a tender husband would have sat, children might have been going and coming—dancing feet, singing voices, music, laughter, kisses, caresses—the place would have been a centre from which all good influences should have radiated; it would have been that powerful and lovely agent of good in the world—a happy home.

And now—ah! It was Doris Black that had robbed her of all that—that had robbed the world of a good man in Allan, it was she who had lured him into ways of evil, had pulled him down into the mire and filth, had made return and the desire of return impossible, had vitiated, had ruined, had destroyed him!

A whirl of anger wrapped her as she thought of it—a white fire seemed to burn at her heart. Not only the loss of her own happiness, not only her own desolation, but the debasement, the degradation, the corruption of that soul and body, rose before her, as if demanding to be avenged.

She realised it all for the first time; she was aghast with a sort of horror of it. She hoped, she could almost have prayed, that punishment might be meted out to that woman in the measure of the awful wrong that had been done.

She shuddered and grew faint at the thought of what that wrong was, and she felt that she must never come face to face with Allan, lest it should not be safe—lest she herself, in a sudden frenzy, should take vengeance into her own hands.

And while she still sat there, lost in the darkness of her thoughts, there was a peal of the bell, and a sound of scuffling and confusion on the steps, and Susan, bustling in with the lamps, was exclaiming,—

"More of them beggars, I'll be bound! I'll give 'em a piece of my mind, if they want a piece of anything!" on the way to the front door.

But Susan was mistaken. There were no beggars.

"Land alive!" she cried. "It's the constable—and the—and a—you don't say it's—a prisoner!" for there was a woman apparently in their charge. "Don't you be frightened, miss; I'll see to 'em. I should jest think you men-folks that had any opinion of yourselves as all," she cried, turning on them with the fury of one of her own bantams, "would be ashamed to be disturbing two lone women at this time o' night! And you'll be so good as to say what you're after, quick!"

Amy, while this voluble harangue proceeded, fell back in her seat, frightened, angry, insulted. What manner of evil was going to befall her now? Why were they bringing that woman in here? What were they doing with that woman anyway? Who was that woman?

"Don't be distressed, miss," said the officer. "We have a thief in custody; just out of the penitentiary yesterday, and ready to go in again to-morrow. And as some of the property found in her possession is marked with your name, we have brought her here, on our way, to identify it and—"

"With my name!" she asked, tremblingly.

"Yes. These beads. The clasp—your name is engraved there. This cloak—your name is on

the tape. This woman—has she been here? May we ask if you have seen her before?"

Had she seen her before? As the officer spoke he drew away the shawl which the woman had held wrapped round her head.

"She don't give a good account of herself," he said. "She says she was on her way home to her children, walking, and stopped here to rest, and when she told you that her children were starving—"

"They are!" said the woman, sullenly.

"You gave her the chain and—and the rest. Is that true, may we ask again? Have you ever seen her before?"

Had she ever seen her before? As Amy looked into those flaming topaz eyes—those hungry, angry eyes—she wondered where Susan's eyes had been in the morning.

Ah, what a wreck was here—that other wreck she had so lately seen only its counterpart! Where were the blushes now, the dimples, the glances, the smiles, that had lured Allan to his fall, that had made a wreck, too, of all the peace of her own life?

There was that bleared and bloated ruin reeling away from the back door; here was the woman who had caused it, with nothing left of her but the yellow shining eyes.

Nothing! Yes, something left—the love of her children still!

As Amy looked at her, suddenly all the fire and anger in her heart fell.

"Have you really any children?" she said. "Are they truly starving?"

The woman shuddered into a heap on the floor.

"Oh, I have! They are!" she sobbed. "What will become of them if I go to jail again!"

In the draught from the door that had been insecurely closed and had burst open again with the wind, the lamps flared and were blown out, and the answering tongue of flame from the fire burned an instant in those cat-like eyes, on those wan, wringing hands, and seemed to fly for rest to the face and form of the girl, white and still as a statue's.

"I beg your pardon," she said to the officer, while some one relighted the lamps. "I was so bewildered by your sudden entrance! You asked me about those beads! I have given them to that woman. She was here this morning. My maid here heard me say she was welcome to them. They were mine. They are here now. Why didn't you take the miniature case too?" she said, suddenly, turning to the woman and holding it out to her. "I said you might have that. Is that all you are holding her for! The cloak! The dress! Yes, they are here, too."

Was she telling a lie herself? What would Mr. Branton think of her?

In his last sermon he had said that a lie undermined the order of the universe. But Dr. Denham would have tried to save that wretched woman, those suffering children.

Besides, the things were Doris's own. She did give them to her. If it were not enough to give them while she spoke, Susan had heard her say the woman was welcome to one, and might have taken the other.

"Here, my poor woman," cried Amy, "I haven't a great deal of money, but take this too I ought to have been more thoughtful, and have given it to you this morning."

And she took the coins from her little portemonnaie, and went and crowded them into the woman's hand, and led her to the other door, and whispered something to her there, and came back into the room with her face white and shining.

To Dr. Denham, who happened to see the people enter the house and had followed them, it seemed upon that face the white and shining pallor of a saint; but Susan, who had stared at the whole proceedings with her mouth open, but too dry with wrath and wonder to speak, ran for the camphor bottle, clearing the men out of the house as she did so, and setting wide the door to air it after them.

When she opened her eyes, Dr. Denham was kneeling by the sofa, and his head was on her

heart listening for a pulsation. She lifted her hand and laid it on his hair—the dark curly hair where only here and there a thread of silver shone.

"Oh! I am all right," she said.

"Thank Heaven!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were never coming out of it. I was afraid that among them they had killed you."

"I don't die so easily," she said, sitting up, and beginning to rearrange her drenched and fallen hair.

But he took down her hands, and held them both in one of his, taking the place beside her.

"In fact," said he, "you are just going to begin a new life."

And then, as her eyes met his, a flush surged over her white face, the lids fell till their fringes swept the burning cheeks; but she felt that his arm was about her, his head was bent above her, his lips— She shivered under that long kiss, as if happiness were something of which she had known so little that it awed her.

"Well," said Susan, bustling into the room an hour afterwards, on some pretext of her own, and with the privilege of one woman who has all but reared another. "I suppose you ain't nothing to be thankful for now!"

"Oh, Susan!" said Amy, looking up in a sparkle of smiles and tears and blushes; "I've been so—so—"

"So unthankful. And so slow about taking up your blessings when they were set before that you felt kind o' strange about it now. Well, I come in to tell ye that I s'pose you'll be for asking the doctor here to eat his Sunday dinner to-morrow."

"And the best thing to be done," said the doctor, "is for you and Susan to pack your trunks and come over and eat your Sunday dinner with me. I'll come for you at twelve o'clock to-morrow morning."

"I declare," said Susan, slowly withdrawing and closing the door behind her, "that cake as I made on the sly is a leading of providence. If I'd a thought I was makin' weddin'-cake when I stunned them rascals—I hope the citron's cut rich. I wish I'd squirted the dressing on in scrolls instead of slabbing it on with a knife. And I do know how I'm ever to get on with the doctor's Molly. She can't draw a fowl so's 'twon't taste bitter in the breast, and to-morrow's dinner 'll be a poor show for me, though I don't suppose they'll know it from hector and ammonia. But if I'm going to bring that Molly into subjection, it's lucky for me that I begin when we're all in tune together."

But as Susan closed the door, the doctor rose.

"I suppose her coming and going means that I should go too," he said, with a light laugh. "That cake of hers—"

How fine he was, she thought, as she looked up at him, standing there. How manly, how noble, how restful, with the deep happiness in his eyes, in his smile, in his voice! What a life of well-doing had his been! How he had gone about doing the Master's work with his long waking nights beside the sick and dying, his cold drives up snowy hills, through storms and heat, every day, a day of sacrifices to others! And she—

It never entered the doctor's thoughts to imagine that she was saying to herself that the heart that had so long held the image of that unclean thing was not clean enough for him.

He had thought to make the great step into the near and blessed future easy by treating it in a matter-of-fact way; but the flush had all flown from the sweet, pale face, and the tears were just ready to spin.

"My darling!" he exclaimed, as he felt the thrill of the little hand in his, "why do you tremble! Are you afraid of the shelter in the arms that will hold you against the world? Are you afraid to lean on this heart that only beats for you? But I have not loved so dearly and waited so long to venture any delays. I will not give the bird a chance to fly. I am going to make this day the key-note of all the days of my life with you, every day of which shall be happier than the last."

[THE END.]

STAUNCH AND TRUE.

[A NOVELETTE.]

(Continued.)

CHAPTER VI.

"I do wish, Lola, my dear you would cheer up a little," said Lady Findlay. "You look so wan and ill that you really alarm me; the change seems to have done you more harm than good. I never see a smile on your face now!"

"I am fatigued, mamma. Railway journeys generally knock me up."

"Indeed! I am really anxious about you; you look just like a person arisen from a sick bed."

"Does she suspect?" thought Lola, in momentary alarm.

But it was only a random shot fired off innocently.

"If only you knew the truth," she thought sadly, "what would you say to my deceit? I have been punished—first in the loss of my husband, and now in that of my child."

Phyllis joined Lola later on in her boudoir, when the latter asked eagerly,—

"What news of my child, Phyllis?"

"There is a letter in answer to the advertisement."

"Thank Heaven!" she ejaculated fervently.

"It is worded very guardedly, and merely says,—'If X. Y. Z. will call at 60, New-street, Kenish-town, something may be heard of the child.' Will you go, Lola?"

"I—oh no; it would be too rash. Phyllis, please help me in this matter."

"What if Bertram should ever hear of my connection with it? Oh, Lola! tell your mother all, for the sake of your innocent child and me."

"Are you going to desert me?" she demanded, reproachfully. "Surely no harm can come of your seeing these people? You need not give your name or address. If you only knew the wearing anxiety and torture I am enduring you would be the first to try and allay it."

Whereupon she burst into a flood of bitter tears, which conquered the warm-hearted, noble girl.

"Don't fret, dear Lola. I will go, come what may."

"Heaven bless and reward you for your devoted fidelity!" sobbed Lola, catching her hand and kissing it. "You are the only true friend I possess in all the world."

Lola and true as she was, yet Phyllis could not thoroughly sympathize with the greed and ambition that prompted Lola to sacrifice everything and everybody to it. But it was too late to draw back; besides, she was not his sister, and as such entitled to her aid, sympathy and affection!

After a silence of some minutes Phyllis said,—

"Should they name a large sum of money, do you authorize me to agree, Lola?"

"Yes, yes, a thousand pounds—even more so long as they restore my darling, and ask no questions. I have drawn a large sum of money out of the bank in anticipation. Will you take some notes with you as an earnest?"

"No. It would be imprudent; for, as yet, we do not know whom we are dealing with. I will do my best to bring negotiations to a successful issue. I hope everything will be settled before Bertram's return, as he will want a great deal of my society."

Late that evening, Phyllis, closely veiled, was driven to New Street, a shabby genteel place, where she alighted and walked down the straggling street as directed.

"Good evening, ma'am," said a hard-featured woman, "are you X. Y. Z.?"

"Yes; but surely we cannot talk here!" said Phyllis, still keeping down her fall.

"Certainly not, ma'am, only we have to be cautious with delicate business of this nature, and I thought it best to come and meet you lest you went to the wrong house. Please follow me."

With a little trepidation Phyllis complied, and soon found herself in a dingy little room lighted

by a smoky paraffin lamp. Phyllis cast a hurried glance around to see if there was a trace of a child, but in vain.

"Now, ma'am, are you the baby's mother?" the woman asked.

"I decline to answer; you will be well paid if you restore it to me, but first the child must be shown to me so that I can identify it."

"Oh! it's him right enough, ma'am, but, you see, it isn't altogether in my hands."

"Then why did you send for me?" she asked, frigidly.

"Because you advertised," she replied, defiantly.

"Why have you brought me on a fool's errand?" demanded Phyllis, indignantly, getting somewhat alarmed at the position of affairs.

She was here alone in a strange neighbourhood, and anything but in an inviting house.

"What if this is some trap?" she thought, looking round in alarm.

"You needn't be afraid, ma'am," her companion said, sneeringly. "There's nobody here any worse than ourselves. Now to business. What will you give me if I can get you the child?"

"What sum do you ask?"

"Two hundred for myself and four hundred for the other party; but no notes, it must be in gold—chinking gold."

"I agree!" Phyllis exclaimed, eagerly.

"When can I see the child? The moment it is placed in my arms, and I am assured it is the one which was stolen, the money will be paid in gold."

The woman's eyes glistened with intense cupidity at the sum agreed upon, and said, huskily,

"A letter will be sent to X. Y. Z. at the post-office as before, naming a place and day. You couldn't give me a few sovereigns on account, ma'am!" this in a cringing, whining tone, as she held out her grimy hand.

To propitiate her Phyllis opened her purse, and gave her all the gold of her private little store, which was three pounds.

She breathed more freely when she reached the street, for brave as she was her courage had been greatly tried by the interview.

The door had scarcely closed upon her when Richard Ward joined the woman from his hiding-place, an adjoining room which had folding-doors.

"You heard what she said, sir? Six hundred pounds, that's a tidy sum, and would keep me in comfort till the end of my life."

"Yes, but you forget the one important fact that you cannot put your hand upon the child," he said, with quiet power.

"You wouldn't round on me in this mean way!" she replied, savagely; "two can play at that game, you know."

"Indeed! Now listen to me, Mrs. Quelch. You are only a very small personage in this drama, and must take a back seat; you will be paid handsomely, but only on condition you obey my orders."

"But suppose I refuse?" she snapped, viciously.

"Your claws have been drawn, my good soul," he sneered; "if you like to confess that you stole a child, do so by all means. You will stand alone, you see; you don't know who I am, and never shall. Already you have received twenty pounds, besides what the lady just gave you; that is not bad pay, Mrs. Quelch."

"But six hundred! Only fancy that!" she said, querulously; "four hundred for you, two for me."

"Not six thousand would buy the child at this moment. Here are five pounds; you will receive the same sum weekly until the business is finally settled."

"And then?" she queried.

"You will be amply rewarded. Take or leave my offer; in any case, I am on the right side of the hedge; you are not, Mrs. Quelch."

"Ain't I to write to X. Y. Z. again?" she asked, in a tone of suppressed rage.

"No, not till I give you permission."

"But suppose the lady calls on me!"

"She won't do that. You are only a weekly tenant, and must leave here at once."

"I won't be bullied and badgered like this," she snarled.

"Very well. Good-night, Mrs. Quelch; I can do without you," this as he opened the door with perfect sang froid that brought her, metaphorically, to her knees.

"I am convinced Phyllis is the mother of that child," he muttered, triumphantly, as he walked down the street, followed by Mrs. Quelch's deep curses. "I will permit her to play her comedy a little while longer and bring the curtain down with an unexpected rush. Sir Bertram Findlay will never put a wedding-ring on her finger, clever as she deems herself."

Meanwhile Phyllis had reached home, where her return was anxiously awaited by Lola.

"Where is my baby-boy?" she asked, in a voice hoarse with pent-up emotion, springing forward to meet her.

"I have arranged preliminaries, that is all, Lola; the child is safe, I could learn nothing further."

"Why didn't you call in the police," Lola rejoined, almost angrily.

"Lola, don't be unjust; you know I dared not. The woman promised to write to me in a day or two; six hundred pounds will have to be paid, all in gold."

"What sort of a person was she, Phyllis?"

"Well, not very prepossessing, but from what I could gather she is only an agent or go-between in the affair. Courage, dear, I think we shall soon see the end of this trouble."

"Oh! the misery of it all," she moaned, hiding her face in her hands; "his child in the clutches of wretches who might murder it! Phyllis, unless my troubles soon end, I shall go mad—mad!"

"Lola, bear with me as a true friend and well-wisher. You have only to say the word, and all will be well. Be brave, you are rich, and surely happiness is worth more than wealth!" Phyllis said, gravely.

"Have I not repeatedly told you you do not understand this question?" Lola said, with a tinge of acrimony in her voice. "Ever since I could understand the word of riches it was dinned into my mind from childhood that I was to inherit my aunt's princely fortune. Love conquered my heart, but not my determination to obtain my birthright—husband and child lost to me perhaps, yet I cling to the hope of this vast wealth. Deem me selfish, greedy, what you will, but do not seek to change my resolve."

As she spoke she seemed to become transformed; her eyes glistened, a hectic flush came into her face, and her form was rigid as iron—a different Lola to what she had been a few minutes previously.

Phyllis instinctively shrank back at the sight thus revealed to her, which was enough to make angels weep and fiends rejoice.

Without any ceremony Lady Findlay burst in upon their privacy, and evidently very much out of breath, for she gasped out,—

"Your aunt!"

Lola, starting up excitedly, interrupted her by asking,—

"Is she dead?"

"Dead! no, she's better!" she rejoined, volubly throwing herself into a chair and fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief. "My dear, you must go at once to your aunt. She has sent her carriage for you, with a most urgent request that you start off at once. You know what she is, Lola, and so don't vex her by delaying."

Phyllis, from the way in which Lady Findlay fussed and fumed, could plainly see the cause of Lola's apparent selfishness. She had been schooled by her mother to hang on tenaciously to her aunt's favour, and had proved too apt a scholar.

"For goodness sake, make haste child!" implored her mother, as Lola entered the room, dressed in black, unrelieved by a vestige of colour. "Oh, my dear Lola! I do wish you would persist in wearing those sombre dresses. One would think you were in mourning. Give my fondest love to your aunt, and say, as she is in town, I will pay my respects to her to-morrow early."

Lola would have journeyed to the North Pole in deference to her aunt's wishes, which to her were commands, for looming in the near future was a splendid inheritance.

She ascended the steps in Portland-place with a beating heart, for she had a presentiment that her aunt wished to speak to her about the man she had selected for her husband.

Nor was she mistaken, for Mrs. Selindon said, almost as soon as she entered,—

"Child, I have made an alteration in my will!"

Lola almost dropped into a chair with apprehension, for these words seemed to presage that some one had betrayed her secret; and like a flash it occurred to her that the traitor was Phyllis.

"How ill you look, niece! You must get the roses back, or Colonel Mowbray will think you not the beauty you were when he saw you last."

Lola heaved a sigh of relief, for she had fully expected to hear her secrets disclosed.

"I am only a 'leisure' indisposed, aunt, dear. I am glad you are better. Do you intend staying long in town?"

"Yes, till the marriage!"

"Bertram's, you mean, I presume!"

"No, he is a silly boy! I do not approve of *mélanges*. Your marriage to the Colonel, and to prevent you making a fool of yourself like your brother has, I have altered my will, making you my heiress conditional on your marrying Colonel Mowbray."

"Thank Heaven, I am free!" Lola thought. "What a precipice I stood upon! The child I need never own; he can be adopted for money."

"You do not seem too well pleased, niece!" the old lady said, pettishly, as Lola made no reply.

"Oh, yes, aunt! I am very pleased to obey your wishes," she returned, docilely, conjuring up the ghost of a smile.

"That is well. The Colonel is on his way home, and will be here next week."

"But surely the marriage will not take place before the end of the year, aunt!" Lola remarked, uneasily.

"Hoity, toity! Yes, in two months at the latest. You can order your trousseau at once. I have drawn a large cheque for you as a present. You have nothing to do but to look charming, and be submissive to my wishes."

"It is all so sudden," she protested, deprecatingly.

"More sentiment! I told you you were to marry him a year or more ago. Now, be frank with your old aunt. Have you fallen in love elsewhere?"

Here was an opportunity of telling the truth and gaining her aunt's forgiveness; who, despite her arbitrary manner, was really warm-hearted. But with a perverseness worthy a better cause, she stolidly kept her secret locked in her breast, saying—

"No, aunt, my heart is free."

"Then why object to an early day for the wedding, eh, you silly puss!"

In the end it resulted in Lola giving way at all points, though conscience rebelled at the transaction.

One thought she did offer up to appease the spirit of her dead husband, and this was that the ship conveying her future bridegroom might never reach the shores of Albion.

CHAPTER VII.

ANXIETY and care had made poor Phyllis look very wan and pale. Her pretty eyes were latent with some silent grief which quite perplexed Sir Bertram when he clasped her in his arms, and gazed into the piteous little face that tried so hard to resume its wonted sunny expression which had taken his heart by storm.

"I must scold Lola for not taking more care of my little sunbeam," he said, fondly. "Now tell me, my dear one, were you fretting because I was too long away?"

"I missed you sadly, Bertram; but I have not been grieving at all; indeed, I have not," she answered, warmly.

"Have you any secret worry about money?" he queried; "let me be your banker if it is so."

"No, no; I am rich," she laughed, sweetly. "Now you must not notice my silly face."

"Not notice the dearest thing earth holds for me! Why, you might as well forbid me to breathe. It was your sweet face that stole my heart; and to see it thin and white makes me wretched. I must take you to myself with all speed, and run away with you to sunny Italy, where everything is bright and joyous. I feel like a miser does over his treasure—I want it all to myself."

"If only I dared to tell him how Lola's secrets are weighing me down, and making life a terror to me," she thought, sadly, as he held her to his heart, and pressed soft, loving kisses on her brow and lips. "How unworthy I am of such love as his!"

"Oh, Lola!" she said that night before retiring to bed, having sought her to make one last entreaty to release her from the terrible incubus that was crushing her. "release me, for the love of Heaven! I feel it impossible to meet the truthful, searching eyes of your brother. He has noticed the change in me, and even tried today to probe the cause."

"It would be sheer madness now, dear Phyllis," she urged, coaxingly. "I have to sacrifice my widowhood, my child, to keep the secret. Once Bertram's wife, and no harm can befall you, while I must carry a thorn in my heart till I die!"

"You never intend going to the altar with Colonel Mowbray, deceiving him as to your true position?"

"No! oh, no!" Lola answered, emphatically; "I shall tell him all," but she added to herself this mental reservation: "Not till after my marriage."

"I am so thankful to hear you say that, because I shall then be set free," Phyllis replied, with the old cheery ring in her voice.

Three times had Phyllis visited the post-office for a letter, each time only to be disappointed, nor could she find Mrs. Quelch, who had gone from New-street at the instigation of Richard Ward, and left no vestige of a trace behind her.

The wedding-morn came at last, when Phyllis was to become the wife of Sir Bertram, who had chosen her from among hundreds of rich, titled maidens, because he loved her for herself alone.

Phyllis stood before her mirror, a happy smile on her face, which was dyed with blushes one moment to alternate the next with the tinge of the lily as Lola's dread secret would intrude like the handwriting on the wall at the feast of Belshazzar.

It was a soft, summer morning, the atmosphere slightly hazy, with tiny, fleecy cloudlets commingling with patches of pearly blue and rose colour.

In a brief space, thanks to the efforts of a deft handmaiden, Phyllis was robed in shimmering white—as fair a bride as sun ever shone upon.

Carriages were rolling up to the door to put down their aristocratic burthens amid a flutter of great excitement.

There were the soft, musical voices of women, the odour of fragrant perfumes from numberless bouquets.

Suddenly Phyllis said to her maid,—

"Please ask Lady Findlay for my bouquet; I had nearly forgotten it."

Instead of the tiring woman returning with it her ladyship brought it herself, looking magnificent in her regal purple dress, and its costly rose-point lace, the Findlay diamonds flashing on her bonnet, her neck, and wrists.

"My dear child, Bertram has come, and has requested you to go to him at once in the library. For gracious sake, make haste, or we shall be late at church. It is too provoking of him to come here at this late hour!"

A nameless horror seized upon the bride, who, with blanched cheeks, and her gleaming robes floating in billowy waves around her slender form, went down to meet—what?

"Phyllis!" said Sir Bertram, sternly, "are you worthy to be my wife? You know too well you are not!"

"Bertram! what do you mean?" she gasped.

"That you have basely betrayed my love!" he thundered. "Your child bears testimony against you!"

"My child!" she wailed, almost inarticulately, the dread truth flashing upon her with a crushing blow that Lola's sin was being visited upon her defenceless head. "You are cruel!"

"Cruel! I think that you have stabbed my heart through and through, but even now I will listen if you will tell me the truth, and ask for forgiveness. Who is the father?"

The hot blood of indignation flamed into her face, dyeing it the colour of scarlet at the mere thought that the man she loved so well should put such wanton insults upon her.

All her pride rose in arms as she said, with withering scorn,—

"Sir Bertram, you seem only too ready to believe the worst. I suppose it is because I have no father or brother to take my part!"

Struck by her manner, which was not that of guilt, he asked himself this question,—

"Am I casting from me a pearl of great price or simply putting my heel on the head of a viper? By Heaven! I could even believe her unsupported word if the honour of my house was not at stake!"

"Will you face the woman who says the child is yours?" he asked, eagerly.

It was on the tip of her tongue to say "yes, but your sister must be present."

She could have hurled back scorn for scorn, and made his ears tingle with humiliation; had he been more of the lover and less the judge she might have broken her vow and told him all.

But, in condemning her harshly, she, whom he had chosen for his wife, he had aroused her pride, and she resolved to let him act his part out and suffer.

"Yes, I will!" she said, haughtily, "but not in these trappings—this bridal mockery. You shall not speak to me as your affianced wife, but as Miss Wynford, an outraged, innocent woman!"

"Phyllis, for Heaven's sake, do not be precipitate!" he urged, trying to detain her. "If you are innocent our marriage can proceed. The guests are here, but need not know aught of this."

She plied him in her heart, and said,—

"Give me five minutes for thought!"

"Yes, ten, if you choose!" he answered, excitedly.

"Phyllis, what is the meaning of this! You look so wild and unlike yourself!" cried Lola, when she burst in upon her, while her maid was putting the finishing touch to her toilet.

"Send Hobson away," she said, hoarsely.

"Can sudden joy have turned her brain?" thought Lola, in bewilderment, as she motioned to the woman to go.

Locking the door against intrusion, Phyllis said, in a voice of mortal anguish, for too well she realised how much she would lose should Lola fall her,—

"The woman who has your child is here, and has seen Bertram!"

"What!" she exclaimed, in horror, a grey-ness stealing into her face, which the pearl-powder cannot hide.

"Yes, it is too true; and Bertram believes the child to be mine—accuses me of perjury—insults me with words that make my ears tingle with shame, and clothes my very soul in sackcloth and ashes. Oh, Lola! I was true to you all along, but now you must release me from my oath!"

"No, no! I cannot—will not, just now."

"Can you see my name dragged into the dust and stand by without coming to my help?"

"Have you hinted the truth to Bertram?"

"No; the confession would come with a better grace from you than an accusation from me. What have you to fear? You are legally wife, widow, mother; no one dare dispute that!"

Kneeling abjectly, Lola said, piteously,—

"Don't bring me into this unhappy question! The shame of it would kill my mother, and turn

my aunt into my bitterest enemy. Give me time, and I will release you by making a full avowal of my deceit!"

"But Bertram is waiting for me now—now!" cried Phyllis, piteously. "Will you or will you not do me me justice! Your brother taunts me with being—I dare not put it into words."

"Have pity! have mercy!"

"Which prayer means that you refuse, and I am to be sacrificed. But I would not wed Sir Bertram now if he sued me on his knees. Good-bye! and may you never suffer the shame and humiliation your cruel secret has inflicted upon me!"

When she returned to the library she was not robed as a bride, a fact that caused Sir Bertram to stagger in blank dismay.

"Now, woman!" she said, haughtily, to Mrs. Quelch, "what is your business with me!"

"To bring you your child," was the insolent answer, "and to claim the six hundred pounds you promised me!"

"Is this true, Phyllis!" Sir Bertram asked, brokenly.

"I am not this child's mother! More I will not say, nor have you any right to question me now, Sir Bertram. Innocent as I avow myself in the sight of Heaven and man, or guilty as you judged me, I refuse to become your wife. If I am this child's mother, as you say I am, I will take charge of it," she said, turning to Mrs. Quelch, and taking the baby from her unexpectedly.

"Not without my lawful money!" she snapped, spitefully. "Keniah Quelch ain't to be done like that by you, who ain't no better than you ought to be, though you're such a fine marm!"

She made a rush towards Phyllis, when Sir Bertram, seizing her by the arm in a vice-like grip, said, sternly,—

"Stop this bawling. Go; there is the door, woman!"

And overawed by his manner she slunk away like a beaten bound, muttering,—

"I'll be even with that fellow who led me into this mess. I've done all his dirty work, and he leaves me in the lurch. He thinks I don't know who he is, and where he lives; but I do, and I'll leave the mark of my ten fingers on his ugly, false face, drat him!"

Sir Bertram left Phyllis alone to go and collect his thoughts, for he felt dazed. On his return Phyllis was gone.

A look of very anguish came into his face as he saw that he had lost the woman he still loved. Leaning one arm on the mantelpiece, he bowed his head and groaned,—

"Fool! madman that I was, in thinking her guilty! There is a mystery which I will do my best to unravel. Then, should my darling prove as innocent as I wish to believe her, I will beg her forgiveness on my knees, and be her very slave."

"Bertram! what is the meaning of this!" demanded his mother, angrily. "Where is Phyllis!"

"I do not know," he said, with a ghastly smile. "I have driven her away."

"Have you no explanation to offer me, your mother!"

"Yes, some woman came here and said Phyllis was a mother before she was a wife!"

"Was it true?"

"How can I tell. Phyllis denied it; and, resenting my insane accusation, left, taking the child with her. Mother! what would you advise me to do at this crisis!"

"You spoke of a child. Let me think."

"Yes; can you throw any light upon this mysterious affair, mother?"

"You know that Lola and Phyllis went to a place called Woodstock!"

"Yes, yes," he rejoined, impatiently.

"Well, I took them by surprise, and what do you suppose happened?"

"How can I possibly imagine!"

"I heard a child crying, and questioned Phyllis about it, when she said it belonged to one of the servants. But I thought it marvellously strange

that this should be so when I saw how the infant was dressed."

Without a word in explanation of his resolve he strode out and went straight up to his sister's room, muttering,—

"I think I can see light. My darling has been made a scapegoat of for the sins of another. I dare not say whom, lest the name should be carried by the idle wind and inflict wounds that time or eternity itself could never heal. I must know the truth even if it kills me."

Lola was in her own room, her face colourless, her eyes with a hunted expression in them as if looking in vain for some means of escape from a great danger.

"Who's there!" she asked, in a voice of terror, her nerves were so unstrung.

The answer came when he entered; and, taking both her hands in his, looked down into her face and said,—

"Lola, are you a wife!"

"Let me go, Bertram! How dare you!"

"No, I will have the truth, even if I keep it locked in my heart till I die."

"Are you crazed! Do you wish to ruin my future, to crush me!"

"Heaven help me!" he cried, in a voice full of despair, that even she was touched by it.

"Bertram, be brave; things are ever darkest before the dawn," she said, pleadingly.

"I am in no humour for platitudes!" he murmured. "Give me back the joy that filled my heart this morning, restore my confidence in woman, and you will confer a priceless boon!"

"But you have not explained the meaning of all this?" she said, knowing full well its import.

"Where is Phyllis!"

"Gone! A woman brought a child here, and said it was hers! Lola, I wish you would be frank with me! Why did you and she go to Woodstock?"

"For quiet. It was, as you know, her home. If you follow her there you will, no doubt, find her!"

"Lola, let me make one last appeal. Our mother tells me there was a child in the cottage when she visited you. Whose was it!"

"Really, Bertram, how can you ask me such a question! I positively refuse to answer you. If you had not been a madman this morning nothing unpleasant would have happened! You believed an unknown woman's word before that of your bride; and now you harry and distress me. It is too cruel!"

"Forgive me, Lola," he said, contritely. "The shock has almost unseated my reason."

"Find her, Bertram, bring her back with honour, for I tell you she is innocent!"

Lady Findlay entered at this juncture, her face full of anxiety, and said,—

"What am I to do with our guests! Oh! that this shame should have come upon me! Your aunt will be very angry, and our names will be on every tongue! Bertram, this is your doing! What blessing could follow your rash choice of a wife!"

"Leave it to me, mamma," Lola said, soothingly. "I will take your place for to-day!"

"But what excuse can you frame!"

"Sudden indisposition of Phyllis, any mortal thing to put them off the true scent! Stay here, and leave all to me!" And she raised her head proudly, as Ajax did when defying the lightning, and, with a haughty carriage, swept out of the room, to face what most women would have shrunk from aghast!

CHAPTER VIII.

"I must see the gent!" cried Mrs. Quelch, who had partaken freely of sundry drams on the way to Mr. Ward's office to give her Dutch courage; and if her face, purple as it was with rage and drink, was any index of what was coming, Richard Ward was going to have a warm ten minutes of it.

Pushing past the clerk in anything but a gentle fashion, she entered the private office of her accomplice in this criminal transaction.

"Well, what brings you here!" he asked, in wrathful astonishment, for he had hugged the

idea of having completely outwitted this haridan, and kept his identity from being discovered.

"Oh! Why don't you say how pleased you are to see me, and offer a lady a chair!" she blazoned, as she threw her ponderous body into the state arm chair. "You're a nice cup of tea, you are, a most proper young man! The game's up, Mr. Sneak. I've come here to have it out with you. Keniah Quelch won't be diddled by a dirty lawyer!"

"You had better behave yourself, Mrs. Quelch," he said, grinding his teeth, his eyes flashing with a greenish hue. "You forget yourself, and where you are!"

"Oh, no, I don't, Mr. Impudence. I know something that will get you legged, and I'm the woman to do it. You've lost me six hundred golden sovereigns. If that ain't enough to rile a saint—we had a parson in our family once—I'd like to know what is!"

"Where is the child!" he asked, uneasily.

"With Miss Wynford! Her that was to be married this morning, but ain't a-going to now. Ah! I see you are glad; but I ain't. You think me a fool, but I'm not. She's not the mother no more than you are!"

"How do you know that!" he demanded, looking at her keenly.

"Why, easy enough! When you humbugged me into going down to Woodstock, I prowled about the place before I could do the job, and I saw the real mother nursing the baby. And who do you think she is!"

"Really, I am not good at riddles."

Leaning across the table until her fetid breath brushed his face, on which a deep look of anger and disgust was depicted, she said, in a husky whisper, as if her throat was as dry as a lime kiln—

"Why, a tip-top swell, one of the family. I saw her picture hanging up in the room."

"Ah! a mare's-nest!" he exclaimed, though he mentally resolved to follow up the clue she had given him.

"Don't you call me names! A mare, indeed!" she growled, looking at him spitefully.

"Now, where's my money! If you don't give it me I'll go straight to the magistrate and tell him all. Do you hear!"

He rose, and walking quietly to the door, which was ajar, looked out, and saw his clerk listening intently, and rubbing his hands gleefully.

"What are you doing! Why are you not at the Court!" he thundered, furiously. "Be off this minute, or I'll sack you!" this viciously.

"No; don't you go, young man!" Mrs. Quelch yelled. "You shall take me!"

But Ward hustled his clerk out of the room, and locked the door, putting the key into his pocket.

"Now, my dear Mrs. Quelch, let us drop threatening," he said, changing his manner into a conciliatory one. "You want money!"

"Yes, I do; and I mean to have it!" she asserted.

"Yes, that is only natural. If I give you five pounds now, that will keep you going until I settle this business for your benefit."

"You can't throw dust into my eyes, Mr. Collar and Cuffs. Now, what's your little game!"

"Really, I only wished to save an honoured family from disgrace, to stop a marriage which would have brought shame and disgrace with it. Instead of hundreds I expect to reap thousands, and you will share the money with me if you only hold your tongue. Now can't you see why I demurred at giving up the child to X Y Z? But suppose we talk this affair over a glass of wine! I am sorry I have only sherry in the place," he added.

"I like sherry wine, but not in thimblefuls, for I am thirsty. Put it in a tumbler and fill it up, if you want to make friends with me."

"Certainly, my dear Mrs. Quelch; and will you take biscuits with your sherry!" he asked, ironically.

"I don't mind if I do. I am sorry you sent the young man away; he might have fetched me threepennorth of rum to put in the sherry wine, just to wake it up a bit, you know."

Such a withering expression of contempt and disgust came into his face as he turned away to get the decanter from an inner room.

He piled her with the wine until at last she fell into a tipsy slumber.

"You are safe enough for a few hours at least," he muttered, as he locked the door; and, putting on his hat, made his way into the street, where, summoning a cab, he told the man to drive to Regent's-park.

"I know there is a Miss Findlay," he mused, as he cogitated over Mrs. Quelch's discovery. "Now, by putting this and that together, there is a strong suspicion pointing to her, by Jove! If this should prove the fact I'll have made a good day's work. I have stopped the marriage, and obtained a hold upon one who will pay me well to keep her secret. I have something else to say to Sir Bertram—a document to show him that will make suspicion doubly sure in his mind. After all, Phyllis Wynford will, nay, must be my wife!" The footman, in answer to his inquiry, said that Miss Wynford was not at home.

"When do you expect her to return?" he asked.

"Can't inform you, sir."

"Oh! that's awkward. My business is important. Can I see Miss Findlay?" slipping a tip into the man's hand.

"I'll see, sir."

"Please take my card. I will state my business in pencil on the back of it."

"Will you walk this way, sir!" the servant said; "Miss Findlay will see you."

A gleam of triumph lit up his sallow countenance as he followed his guide up the noiseless stairs.

"Have I the honour of addressing Miss Findlay?" he asked, hesitatingly.

"Yes," eying him with a searching glance. "I see by your card that your business relates to Miss Wynford. Please explain how I can be of service to you."

"I am a very old friend of hers," he said, taking a chair and drawing it closer to hers; "in fact, we both came from the same place—Woodstock. I believe you and Miss Findlay spent a few months there!"

"Well, what of that?" she asked, shifting uneasily under his basilisk gaze.

"A child was born at Ivy Cottage, and subsequently stolen. Now I am in a position to state that Miss Wynford was not its mother; and having heard a whisper, as we solicitors frequently do, in a mysterious fashion, that she is accused of having given it birth, I have come here to see Lady Findlay and Sir Bertram to clear her character in their eyes—that is, if you see no objection to such a course, Miss Findlay?"

"Sir, you amaze me. How can the matter possibly affect me?" she faltered, turning as white as alabaster.

"Well, you see, I had to make inquiries at Woodstock before I could assert Miss Wynford's innocence. Dr. Evans, Mrs. Giles, and Kate Harley can prove that Miss Wynford's friend was the mother of the child, and she is—"

He waited to see what she would say before he finished the sentence.

"Spare me!" she moaned, wringing her hands in very torture of soul.

"I have no wish to be harsh, Miss Findlay," he said, quietly, "but unfortunately, there are others who must be bribed to secrecy. If you are a married lady of course there is nothing to conceal."

He watched her with secret joy, for ever since he had read the announcement of Phyllis's approaching marriage he hated the Findlays, one of whom was now completely in his power—under his thumb, so to speak.

For an instant her pride rebelled, and she was on the point of retorting haughtily,—

"I wish to bribe no one, and you will have to reckon with my family for your unwarrantable insinuations!"

But her vision of wealth checked the pride of this proud woman, who, under other circumstances, would have withered this audacious attorney with her scorn and contempt.

Was no good angel near to whisper a warning

to avoid this man as she would a venomous reptile? He had already ruined the fair fame and character of the woman he professed to love, and was now weaving a net to encompass the same ends for Lola.

But greed of wealth was her idol, which she had worshipped since her childhood, and now she dare not shatter it to pieces to escape from the toils of this unscrupulous fellow.

"What sum would you require?" she asked, tremulously. "Name it, and it shall be yours; but let me tell you not to put a false construction on my motives, or attempt to persecute me, or by one single word I will escape from the thralldom!"

She looked him straight in the eyes with something of her old fire, and he knew that the gauntlet she had thrown down must not be picked up by him; or, in other words, that she was not to be trifled with, or considered a hapless victim.

"Quite so. I understand; and you will find me an honourable man."

"Of course your desire is to clear Miss Wynford's honour!" she hinted.

"Well—er—of course, that won't do now, or the whole truth must come out. She is to be married shortly to Sir Bertram, I believe. In that case she will be safe from scandal."

He pretended, hypocrite that he was, to be ignorant of the morning's occurrence, and awaited her answer with natural curiosity.

"Pray do not bring her into the question at all, Mr.—Ward; but you want money. I have asked you to name your price."

"Would—er—a thousand pounds be too great a sum?"

"What guarantee have I that your companions will not betray me?" she asked, cautiously.

"The money will keep their tongues quiet, of that you need have no fear. Believe me, Miss Findlay, I shall not participate in its division."

So Richard Ward left the house a richer man by a thousand pounds than he had entered it, with the prospect of "bleeding" her of further sums.

"Oh, Phyllis! how can I ever atone to you for all you have suffered through me?" Lola burst out, in a paroxysm of sudden remorse at the terrible vortex of deceit and misery her ambition had plunged them all into. "I could almost revolt against nature for prolonging the existence of my poor, crotchety old aunt, for if she had died when the doctors gave her up these complications would not have arisen; but there, it is too late for regrets. I must carry out my purpose now at all hazards without flinching. Once married to Colonel Mowbray I can fling down the gauntlet!"

But Richard had not completed his malignant scheme for severing the lovers without the remotest chance of their ever being reunited.

"I have not played my trump card yet!" he chuckled, as he reached his office and unlocked the door. "Now to keep Mother Quelch's tongue quiet with a golden muzzle. By Jove! things have worked wonderfully in my favour!"

Shaking her, by the shoulder he said, pleasantly,—

"Come, rouse yourself, it is getting late; you have slept for several hours."

"Drat it all, how giddy and queer I feel!" she yawned, trying to stand up, but tottering very much. "It's that trash of sherry wine; spirits suit my constitution best. I'd better go and get a drop of rum to pull me together."

"But here is something even better than that—fifty sovereigns, Mrs. Quelch, and more to follow. If you keep a still tongue."

"You ain't a bad sort," she said, in a maudlin voice; "and I thank you very kindly, sir," (with an emphasis on the last word). "Mum's the word with me when a gent. acts handsome."

The moment she had gone he sat down and wrote the following in a feigned hand—

"Should Sir Bertram Findlay wish to learn tidings of Miss Wynford, by applying to Mr. R. Ward, Solicitor, Langton-chambers, Chancery-lane, he might obtain the required information.—A well-wisher of Miss Wynford's."

To some people this letter might appear injudicious, but he knew that he would be dealing

with an honourable man, who, if asked, would give a promise not to reveal the source from whence the information had been derived.

Nor was he disappointed in the result, for early the following morning Sir Bertram was announced.

Ward rubbed his hands in exultation, and said, in a tone of deep respect, bowing deferentially, as he placed a chair for him,—

"I am highly honoured by this visit, Sir Bertram. I presume you have called to favour me with some legal business?"

"Not exactly that, but I had better show you this; it will explain quicker than I can."

"Dear me, this is very astonishing!" he exclaimed, with an air of genuine surprise. "Who could have sent you this mysterious communication?"

"I have come to you for information, Mr. Ward."

"I wish it laid in my power to give it you," he replied, regretfully; "what I know concerning the lady that the letter alludes to is a private affair between her and myself, and I never gave permission to anyone to make our affairs public property."

"What do you mean by coupling your name with Miss Wynford's?" Sir Bertram asked, petulantly. "What is she to you?"

"Since you force me to answer you, I may as well tell you Miss Wynford is my affianced wife."

"What!" the Baronet thundered, perfectly amazed and filled with consternation; "your affianced wife! Why, man, she was to have been married to me yesterday!"

"I cannot see how that can be," he rejoined, quietly; "since this document," hastily unfastening his safe and producing the veritable agreement Phyllis had signed a few months previously, "proves the truth of my assertion."

Sir Bertram's eyes were riveted on this fresh proof of her perfidy, and, with a groan of anguish, he covered his face with his hands to hide his humiliation from this man.

"I am very sorry, Sir Bertram, if this disclosure has pained you. Miss Wynford and I were playfellows from childhood, and our marriage was always considered a settled question, my late father being an old friend, as well as legal adviser, to Mr. Wynford."

"Of course you know where she is now!" the Baronet said, harshly.

"Is she not with Lady Findlay?" he asked, simulating entire ignorance of the events that had transpired so recently.

"No. She left our home yesterday, taking with her a child which some woman brought there and averred was hers."

"I am sorry for that," Ward replied, hypocritically; "but, of course, our marriage will set matters straight."

"Then you are the father!"

"Put what construction you like on my words, Sir Bertram, but loyalty to Miss Wynford forbids my answering your plain question."

"I have been fooled," he muttered, clenching his teeth. "I believed her up to now an injured, innocent woman."

"Please bear in mind that all this is in strict confidence, Sir Bertram. Had I known what I do now I would have prevented this contretemps. I feel deeply sorry for you."

Sir Bertram rose and made his way to the door, his heart too wounded and sore to say another word.

"Now, Phyllis, nothing can save you from becoming mine!" Richard Ward exclaimed, as his rival groped his way, like one demented, into the street.

"As false as fair," he muttered, fiercely. "What an escape I have had, and yet, even now, I can scarcely realise that such an ingenuous face as hers could wear such a mask."

CHAPTER IX.

"WHERE, where can I go!" murmured Phyllis, heart-broken and weary, as she walked along like a person in a dream, the shock having numbed her brain. "I can never look on Bertram's face

again; he ought to have protected me. I am driven forth friendless, almost penniless, with his sister's child, the crown of shame encircling my innocent head, and yet I could not refuse her prayer or forsake her little one. Who knows, she might even be tempted in her frenzied state to do it some injury?"

Instinctively she went in the direction of the railway station to look for Woodstock, where, at least, she could find shelter until she recovered from the effects of the cruel blow which had fallen upon her like a thunder-bolt from out a summer sky.

She was crossing the road, and heard a shout of warning; but her mind was lost to all outward surroundings, and it passed unheeded.

Before she was aware of her peril a carriage dashed by, and knocked her down with her tiny burden.

"What has happened!" asked a venerable old lady, putting her head out of the carriage window as a crowd began to gather. The coachman had pulled up as soon as the accident occurred.

"A young lady and a baby are knocked down, ma'am," the footman said, respectfully.

"How! Surely not by us!"

"Yes, ma'am! Wicks and I shouted with all our might, but she didn't pay any heed."

"Dear me, how very shocking! You had better bring her in here, and tell Wicks to drive home at once. It is my duty to make her every reparation for this unlucky mishap."

In a very few minutes Phyllis and the child were placed in the carriage; and, when the policeman had taken Mrs. Swindon's address, it drove off amid a buzz of excitement from the crowd which, by this time, had assumed great proportions.

"What do you think of her, doctor?" Mrs. Swindon asked, anxiously, when her medical attendant had seen Phyllis.

"I am afraid there is concussion of the brain, my dear madam," he answered, gravely. "She is unconscious, and may remain so for some time. The child is unhurt, I am glad to say. Would you wish her to be removed to a hospital?"

"On no account," she replied, hastily. "She must remain here under your care until we can communicate with her friends."

Thus it happened that Phyllis, through some mysterious ordination of fate, became an inmate at Mrs. Swindon's; and Lola's child was now under the protection of her aunt, although she had schemed and plotted for months to keep her in ignorance of her marriage.

"I am so thankful you have come, dear Catherine," Mrs. Swindon said, tremulously. "I am so perplexed and worried. Where is Lola?"

"Poor Lola is anything but well, so I have run away for a few hours by myself to chat over the coming wedding. I only trust it may prove a brighter affair than our last *fiasco*."

"Ah," moaned the old lady, "misfortunes never come alone. I have had a terrible fright! It has quite unnerved me—an accident, through the stupidity of that idiot Wicks, who's getting as blind as a bat," this testily.

"You ought to have superannuated him years ago, my dear! But were you shaken or the horses damaged?"

"Worse than that. A young girl—such a pretty creature—and her child were nearly killed; and," nodding significantly, "are upstairs." But suppressing her voice, she added: "And she has no wedding ring; and yet there is something so sweet and pure in her face that I cannot make out the presence of a child. It is very odd, isn't it?"

"Odd! Why is it more than that. To harbour a perfect stranger in your house, why, it is injudicious in the extreme!"

"What would you have me do with them?" she asked, testily.

"Send them to a hospital, certainly—not turn your own home into one!"

"Come with me and see her. I think you will alter your opinion, for every detail about the girl and the child is that of refinement."

"Quite a little romance!" Lady Findlay remarked, but not to the extent she imagined. On

seeing Phyllis lying still and motionless, as if the gem had left its socket, she exclaimed,—

"Why is it Phyllis Wynford! What an extraordinary thing!"

"You know her, then?" Mrs. Swindon said, in genuine amazement.

"Yes," she rejoined sadly. "It will break Bertram's heart to hear of this!"

"Bertram! In the name of goodness, what is she to him?"

"His affianced wife! Surely you recollect the name of Lola's companion?"

"My memory is very treacherous, Catherine, but now I recall it. I do remember everything only too well. Only to think I have been foolish enough to sympathise with one so lost to all sense of honour! If she can be removed she must leave my house at once—and that miserable little atom too!"

"Pray don't think precipitate," urged her ladyship gravely. "There is some mystery attached to this poor, friendless child. I am sure the unfortunate girl is not its mother."

"Then who is its mother?" asked the matter-of-fact old lady, querulously. "Why should there be any mystery? There never is unless there has been deceit, perhaps worse?"

"Reserve your judgment until some light is thrown upon the unhappy affair, for I fear much (this tremulously). Let me look at the baby!"

Ringling a bell, a young girl was summoned to bring the child.

"Yes! yes! I would swear to it!" Lady Findlay faltered, stooping down over the sleeping little one excitedly.

Lola's fingers were idly straying over the keys of the piano in a dreamy way, producing sweet, plaintive chords, when her mother burst in, and, catching her by the arm, drew her to the window, and looked straight and searchingly into those dark, blue eyes, which flinched and fell guiltily.

"Lola, I must know the truth! That child is yours!" she exclaimed, sternly. "You shall not trifle with me any longer! You have ruined your brother's happiness, and killed poor, faithful, loyal Phyllis!"

"Great Heavens! Mother dear, do not, I implore you, say she is dead!" she wailed, sinking abjectly on her knees, and hiding her golden head in her mother's robe.

"I refuse to answer you, miserable, pitiless girl, until you confess who is the father of your unhappy offspring! I will try to endure the shame!"

Springing to her feet, and brushing aside her dishevelled hair, she said, proudly,—

"Shame! I am wife, widow, and mother! Lieutenant Kingsford was my unfortunate husband!"

"Thank Heaven!" Lady Findlay ejaculated fervently. "Oh, the relief, my Lola, you have given me! Why did you not confide in me! Have I ever been harsh, or forfeited your love?"

"No! oh no, mother, dear!" she cried, sobbing on her bosom. "I was afraid of aunt's anger and cutting me out of her will. But poor Phyllis! Do ease my terrible suspense. What has happened?"

In a few words the piteous story was told, when Lola, drying her tears, said,—

"I will go to her, nurse her, ay, as never human beings have been cared for yet! If every drop of my heart's blood could purchase her return to life I would give it all willingly! I have been selfish, ambitious, heartless; but now the veil is torn from my eyes, and I see myself as others see me! Mother, can you ever forgive me? Bertram can never! Phyllis, here, in this very room, in her bridal robes and veil, begged of me to have pity, to release her from her vow; and, more noble than I, went forth to meet death, perhaps, rather than betray me! Mother, what a daughter you have lost!"

"You ask me, child, if it is possible for me to forgive you! You are a mother, and what would be your answer to your child's prayer if penitent?—what mine is now. A mother's love is stronger than death itself. We are told to forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven if our enemy provoke us. I, your mother, can forgive until my breath fails me!"

No sound was heard except the broken sob of the penitent Lola and the gentle murmuring voice of the loving parent soothing her, as if she were once again a child.

Their peaceful calm was disturbed by a knock at the door, and on opening it there stood Sir Bertram, ready to start for the Continent on a lengthy tour, England having become doubly hateful to him since his interview with Richard Ward.

"May I tell him all?" Lady Findlay whispered to Lola.

"No; let the penance be mine, as is the offence, Bertram, I humbly beg your pardon. I am the mother of the child that woman brought here. Don't look like that! There was deceit, but, thank Heaven, no shame! I am the widow of Lieutenant Kingsford, and I induced poor noble Phyllis to keep my secret. Go to her! Bring her back to life, and then cure me, your unhappy sister, if you will!"

"Mother, is she mad?" he asked, in a kind of stupefaction. "Phyllis innocent! Oh! What a cruel conspiracy to rob her of honour, my love, and all that made life dear. And for what? To hide a secret, the telling of which bore blame, but no shame!"

"Bertram, remember that suffering purifies. Be merciful to your erring sister, and Heaven may, perhaps, restore Phyllis to you and us never to part; but by a bright future to live down the unhappy past!"

His mother pleaded with outstretched hands and swimming eyes.

"Before I can talk of forgiveness to others I must see my poor, persecuted darling, and sue for pardon on my knees. Then I have a heavy account to settle with—"

"Bertram, have mercy; she is your sister!" exclaimed his mother, her face full of terror.

"I refer to a Mr. Ward who has deliberately mangled Phyllis's fair fame. His offence transcends Lola's a thousandfold," he exclaimed, with flashing eyes and knitted brow, which was as black as thunder.

"Bertram, that man found out my secret, surprised it from me in this very room on your wedding-day, and took a bribe of one thousand pounds from me!"

"The scoundrel!" Sir Bertram blessed; "but he shall repent the day on which he dared to vilify the woman I love. But where is she, poor darling! Where can I go to find her?"

"At your aunt's! Don't be alarmed; she met with an accident!" his mother answered.

"Lola!" he said, huskily. "You must wait for my forgiveness. If Phyllis dies I shall never, so help me Heaven, look upon your face again!"

Before another word could be uttered he strode away, leaving Lola a prey to remorse, and hastened to Portland-place, where he saw Phyllis, who was still unconscious.

In a few scathing words he told the history of Lola's career of deception to his aunt, who listened in angry silence, merely saying at the close,—

"If earth ever held a martyr it does in poor Phyllis Wynford. Take her to your heart if she lives, embalm her in it should death snatch her away; for she is a very queen among women."

"Now to square accounts with that dastard. The coward, to attack defenceless women, to batten on their terrors, to make merchandise of their secrets," Sir Bertram muttered, vengefully, as he gave directions to be driven to Langston Chambers.

Richard Ward was enjoying a dream of elysium, over a choice cigar, and a decanter of rich old port, when, without warning of any kind, Sir Bertram stood before him, his face full of suppressed wrath, his right hand grasping with nervous vigour the handle of a stout horsewhip.

"Sir Bertram, this—"

"Silence, you poltroon!"—he thundered. "Did you not dare to levy black-mail on my sister?"

"Well, I—that is—I did accept money for others, to keep the honour of your family from being dragged in the mire."

In an instant Sir Bertram's iron grip was on



"DON'T CALL ME NAMES!" GROWLED MRS. QUELCH, LOOKING AT HIM SPITEFULLY.

his collar, and the whip raised, as he said between his clenched teeth,—

"You hound! Retract those words! Confess your treacherous lies about Miss Wynford, or I will whip you to within an inch of your miserable life! No equivocation, no evasion, if you value your wretched skin!"

As first he tried to free himself from the baronet's vice-like grip; but one cut from the whip brought him, so to speak, to his knees, for he was a very craven at heart.

"Spare me!" he gasped. "I told you a lie! Miss Wynford is innocent; whether Miss Findlay is you can best say!"

"That document you showed me. Is it a forgery? Quick, my arm is itching to chastise you, you cur!"

"Not a forgery," he protested; "but I added the words about a promise of marrying myself. Your sister's money I will return; and give up documents which will entitle Miss Wynford to half a million of money if you do not prosecute me. It would ruin me if you did."

"I should be doing society an injustice to compromise such villainy as yours," he replied, sternly. "But if you give me a written confession, as well as the papers you spoke of, I will not take any action against you. Only remember, should you at any time dare, by so much as one word, to breathe the faintest breath of scandal against either lady, I will pursue you to the ends of the earth but what you shall receive your deserts! Now write, for every minute I remain here fills me with loathing and disgust!"

Richard Ward complied with the baronet's every demand, and in return was allowed to keep the thousand pounds he had feloniously extorted from Lola.

"Is there no hope, doctor?" Sir Bertram asked, as he stood by the bedside of Phyllis, over whom death's wings were hovering.

"While there is life, there is hope," the physician replied, gravely; "but it is my duty to warn you against false hopes. The patient is

in extreme peril; the crisis will arrive within the next two hours. The issue is in higher hands than mine."

An agonized expression came into the baronet's face as he listened to this verdict of doom upon one who had grown doubly dear to him by her heroic abnegation of self.

Lady Findlay and Lola sat in a state of intense expectancy, the slightest rustle jarring upon their overstrung nerves, as if guarding the portals against that last and mysterious visitor, that dread enemy—death.

Lola's conscience would not be stilled, even by her real repentance and sorrow, but during those hours of watching the lingering spark of life it exacted full toll for the selfish part she had played in the drama upon which the curtain was about to fall.

Both looked up with mute inquiry, more eloquent than words, when Bertram joined them.

Something in his face told them that the news had better not be said, and they forbore to question him.

Not a sound could be heard, except the monotonous ticking of the timepiece, each revolution of which brought Phyllis nearer to the edge of that darkness which led to the Golden City not built by hands; where sickness, nor sorrow, nor death, nor parting ever intrude, but all is peace, joy, and rest!

Her face was grandly carved, every trace of suffering and human passions wiped out by the hand of that grandest of all sculptors—death!

It required a skilled practitioner to assert that life still lingered in that motionless form and face, whose beauty was angelic, as if the features were chiselled out of pure marble.

At last came the dreaded hour, when the spirit would shake off all earthly trammels, or remain and revive the almost inanimate clay.

A hasty footstep, and all three stood up as if electrified by one shock into being and motion.

"She will live!" the doctor said, with a smile. "The crisis has passed; quiet and skilled nursing will do the rest."

Their joy was so deep as not to find utterance for some moments; then Lola, throwing her arms around her mother, sobbed quietly, their tears commingling.

Sir Bertram reflected back the physician's smile, the first his wan face had shown for many a weary day. It was as if the sun had suddenly burst through a bank of black, funeral clouds. If Phyllis was spared so was he, for he could never have outlived her death by a year—his manly heart would have broken in twain.

By the doctor's advice, who was informed of his patient's sad history, or as much as was deemed necessary, Sir Bertram did not show himself until she was on the road to convalescence.

One day, at the close of summer, Phyllis was seated in an invalid's chair reading, when a footstep arrested her attention. Looking round she saw Bertram, and smiling sweetly, said—

"I knew you would come, dear Bertram! You were with me in my illness. I knew it, and strove to speak to you, but something weighed me down. Your mother has told me all!"

"Am I pardoned, my darling?" he asked, in trembling accents.

"Yes, oh, yes, Bertram! You, too, have suffered much because you loved much!" holding out her arms.

He knelt down and was enfolded in them, and a kiss of pardon and love sealed upon his lips.

Phyllis, at the entreaty of Mrs. Swindon, remained with her until the marriage could be solemnized at Swindon Park, quietly, unobtrusively, and the lovers were quite content it should be so.

The old lady did not upbraid Lola for her past misdeeds, but her manner to her had changed. All her affection and esteem had been transferred to Phyllis.

(Continued on page 568.)

In China, to salute anyone by taking off one's hat is a deliberate insult.



HOW TRUE IT IS THAT "TWO IS COMPANY!" I THOUGHT, SORROWFULLY.

BROWN EYES AND BLUE.

CHAPTER VII.

FOR a short time we discoursed on mundane matters, and then, our two baskets being full, I announced my intention of taking them in to Prudence, and returning with two empty ones for further gathering. When I returned along the kitchen-garden path some ten minutes later, I saw them, while yet some way off, engaged in eager confabulation, standing close together, where I had left them.

It could be no trivial discussion, of that I felt sure, judging by their attitude and expression. As I neared them, I heard him say distinctly,—

"It is as dead as though it had never been."

"I doubt if it was ever much alive," she answered, with a dreary kind of smile, as unlike the usual airy curving of her mouth as summer is unlike winter.

"Perhaps not," I heard him say, as I sauntered slowly along the path swinging the baskets, and humming a tune to give them all the time and opportunity I could of saying what they wanted to say to each other. "If there was anything aught you blew it out, remember that!"

"But I can set it alight again," she said in a low, passionate voice, as I reached the first gooseberry bush.

"Never! It's burnt out, quite dead—ah! Miss Celia!"—he went on in a louder tone—"back at last. I hope you've brought some court plaster with you as well as the empty baskets. I have got two scratches several inches long already. Those gooseberry bushes of yours know how to make one smart for robbing them with a vengeance. Unnasy feels the hand that steals a gooseberry, to paraphrase a popular saying."

"I am so sorry," I answered, handing Lella one of the empty baskets, and laying the other down on the ground; "but it's your own fault,

you would be useful. Are they so very bad? Let me look at them!"

In obedience to my command he held out his right hand for my inspection. I took it in mine, and looked over it carefully to discover these same scratches, which, according to his statement, were several inches long. At last I did see two little tiny red marks, which might have been torn by the gooseberry thorns.

"Poor thing!" I said, laughing, "what frightful wounds. One wants a magnifying glass to discover the full extent of the awful damage done. I don't think you will want any court plaster, they will heal by looking at them, I should say," letting his hand drop.

"Who was it, when downstairs I fell,
And caused my cranium to swell,
That kissed the place to make it well?
My Celia!"

Chanted Lella from her gooseberry bush, with her usual sparkle, eyeing us rather maliciously though, I fancied at the moment.

I made no response to this brilliant rally, neither did he. Looking back, I fail to see, indeed, what either of us could have said on the subject. I got very red, though, and put on my most dignified demeanour. Not the ghost of a smile did I allow to flit over my countenance, as I picked up my empty basket, and said quietly,—

"I can easily get you a little court plaster, if you think it necessary; aunt always has some in her work-basket."

"Thank," he answered, quite as soberly as myself; "I really don't think it's at all necessary; they are not such deadly wounds as all that comes to. Probably Miss Neville's remedy would prove as efficacious as anything else. But they are hardly bad enough even for that."

"No," I returned, very shortly indeed, to disabuse his mind that I entertained any idea of hilarity as connected with her remark, and then commenced my gooseberry picking once more, leaving them to carry on their animated conversation with an occasional yes or no from myself.

I had that figurative olive in my mouth all day, and I almost fancy the flavour is not pleasant. I will give it a fair trial though, and not decide too much in a hurry.

Lella's arrival seems to have awoken aunt from her customary purring lethargy. She has been more than usually amiable ever since Saturday evening, calling us her "little kittens," and other fond appellations; in almost a continual state of purr, which denotes that Aunt Rachel has had her own way.

For some reason or another she is glad to have Lella at Gable End, and her expressed thought about my dulness without a girl companion is as far from the real reason of her gladness as that I am far from Heaven's gates.

Curiously enough, too, I had another little shock on Sunday night, which set me a thinking. It came out quite by accident from Lella herself, and it was aunt who wished her to pay the annual visit earlier this summer than usual, and not Lella.

We two girls were looking at a photograph of the scampish brother Richard in her bedroom when I was saying good-night, which she had brought down to show us; and, as I returned it to her, she happened to casually remark that "Dick" didn't want her to come down to Gable End so early, as he, being still in town, would have to find some other housekeeper to undertake the cares of his small domicile for a month or six weeks; in fact, as long as Lella stayed away, which was a difficult undertaking, and one not pleasant to himself. But, she went on, glibly, aunt had written her such a very kind, pressing letter, and seemed so anxious she should come down on the Saturday, that she felt it would be very ungrateful to refuse what aunt evidently wanted her to do.

I opened my eyes when I heard this version of the affair, differing very materially from aunt's to me.

"Oh, he!" I thought to myself, "Lella has, unwittingly, let the cat out of the bag, to speak vulgarly. I suppose aunt has not had an oppor-

tunity, or has forgotten to give Lella a warning not to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, on this occasion, should it happen to arise," but I judiciously held my peace, and merely said,—

"No, aunt never likes her invitations refused. And perhaps it might have seemed ungrateful, as you say."

"Aunt Lascelles is the only one of my kith, kin, or friend, that ever gave me a five-pound note to do as I chose with. For that five pounds I am ever grateful, and her bounden slave, bought and paid for," she returned, with a shrug. "I would do anything or everything she wanted me to do. Can gratitude say more than that? I know it cannot. Yes, that five-pound note bought me, as I said just now. You see, I do not prize myself very highly, do I?" And then she kissed me on either cheek, a kind of bird's peck, as if she feared my colour might come off with undue friction, and so we parted for the night.

Now, what could have been aunt's reason? for reason she undoubtedly had. I have never known her busy herself unnecessarily, be very sure of that. That reason at present, however, is in the shade, whither it will remain, until aunt gives it full and free permission to emerge thence.

However, all to-day she has been sweetness itself—a stick of barley-sugar. Even Collin Broughton came into the halo of amiability. He was asked to come in whenever he liked, and at whatever time he liked; in fact, if aunt were a younger woman, I might say she almost seemed to make love to him, only I give her credit for possessing more sense.

She made him stay to tea, and he didn't require an infinite amount of pressing either. Even Michael put away his Eugene Aram look, and condescended to make a joke. It ought to have been a happy evening; there was everything to make it so. Aunt "sweet" ed me and "precious" ed me extraordinarily, keeping me a good deal by her side, winding her wool, and threading her knitting needles, whilst Collin and Lella found up some old duets, and sung them together.

But it wasn't, at least, not especially happy to me. I felt depressed, not knowing why, and Lella asked me what I had done with my tongue, which was really no business of hers, so I returned rather tartly that I had put it into pickle for a future occasion, at which remark Collin laughed, and said,—

"Bravo, Miss Colla, well reparted!" while Lella darted a little look at me, laden with an infinitesimal portion of spite, for she prides herself upon being in no small degree wittily conversational, and my answer rather swamped her witty endeavour.

The evening at last over, I came up heavy-hearted to bed, Prudence following me. As I nestle down I say,—

"Prue!"

"Well, Miss Colla!"

"Were you ever in love?"

"Lawk-a-me, dearie, for sure I was, years ago;" she answers, with a smile on her old wrinkled face.

"Was he nice?" I query again, with a view to hearing further particulars of Prue's love affair, for once set my old nurse going, like a fresh wound-up toy, she will babble on until she runs down like an eight-day clock.

"I thought so then," with her head on one side, meditating on the recollection of her sweet-heart evidently, "or I shouldn't have liked him so much. He was a fine lad then, I mind me."

"Yes, of course. Come here, and sit down by the bed. I want to hear all about it. Now, first of all, what did you feel like when you were in love?"

"Feel like!" she echoes, contemplatively, sitting down on a chair by my side. "Well, now, it's so long ago, let me think. As to feeling, I know I was times glad and times sorry, despairing like, dearie; and then something 'ud come to make my heart right fair again. Then I'd just sing one day and cry the next. I was all a sort of a dream, like, I remember, now I think of it. But 'twas many, many years ago."

now, and maybe I was but a silly young mawther at best. I know I was mortal jealous of Ben—Ben Hubbard was his name. Mortal jealous, that I was," ends Prue, triumphantly, as if being mortally jealous was, at any rate, highly meritorious and deserving of praise, however much in love she might or might not have been.

"Ab, jealous!" I say, slowly, giving my pillow an extra shake, and nestling my head down again, "and what did that feel like?"

"Right bad, dearie," she returns, confidently, "regular nasty, that is did. An all-overish sort of a kind of tigerish feeling, it was. I couldn't abear to see Ben a-talking with any of the mawthers, and then I'd sulk, cry, and wish myself dead a hundred times, and him too, for that matter. I could ha' given all them mawthers a good smack in the face, 'that I could. Oh, 'twasn't a pleasant thing to feel like that," shaking her white-frilled cap, tied under her chin with a lavender ribbon, deliciously old-fashioned.

"No, Prue, I should say from your description it could not have been an agreeable frame of mind to be in, and all from jealousy, you say?"

"Yes, all nasty, spiteful jealousy of them mawthers."

"You must have been very fond of Ben Hubbard!" I say, presently, as she gets up from the chair and stands against the bed. "How was it you never married him?"

"Well, dearie, there was a very good reason for that," and a smile wreathes Prue's ancient features; "a right fair reason, because he never asked me. So I couldn't very well ha' married him against his will, could I?" with a chuckle at the recollection of Ben's backwardness in proposing.

"Well, hardly under the circumstances, Prue, I do think," I acquiesce, rather sleepily, "but you seem to have got over it very well."

"Ah, but I was right bad for long times after my Ben took up with Sarah Swoch, afore my very face, too, and married her at midsummer. Mortal bad I was, with heartache, dearie. A Pray you may ne'er ha' the like. Then I got the place at Gable End, with your grandmother. She was very aged then, such a fine old lady. I think she had a pity for me, for all the village knew I was mad for Ben Hubbard."

"I wonder you didn't marry someone else, Prue," I say, closing my eyes, heavy with sleep.

"I never saw any man I could like better than Ben, though he did treat me right badly," she answers, simply, shading the light from my face with her hand. "'Twas real love, you see, dearie, real, true love, and I couldn't feel it twice over. Good-night, Miss Colla!" she ends, more in her usual tone of voice, which had got a little sorrowful towards the close of her narrative. We can none of us recall the past without regret, be it ever so sad. Then drawing my curtains she moves away.

By this time I am very drowsy indeed.

"Good-night, Prue," I return as she goes out.

Love! Jealousy! According to Prue's statement the two seem to go hand-in-hand. Can one not love without being jealous, I wonder? One would not so much mind the first if one could go without the second.

Supposing I should fall in love, it isn't improbable, by any means, because "all things are possible to honest men," the old adage runs. It would be very foolish of me, very foolish, indeed. How sleepy I am. Yes, I do sincerely trust—I may not fall—in love—and—be jea—

CHAPTER VIII.

"Curse on this Love, this little scarecrow Love,
That frights fools, with his painted bow of lath,
Out of their feeble senses."

TIME has bound up one whole week in his sheaves of days, weeks, months and years. June is seven days older than she was, so am I for that matter, but I cannot honestly affirm that I am seven days happier than I was a week back. On the contrary, I am seven days more heavy-hearted.

I could sing with the poet, old Samuel Glover,—

"Oh! I'm not myself at all, Molly Bawn, Molly Bawn!
Oh! I'm not myself at all, Molly dear."

and tell no story in so singing. In a hundred little ways I feel that the refrain above is completely applicable to my state of mind—a distasteful fact which I wonder if others notice as much as I do myself.

And the reason you very naturally and sensibly ask! That is the hardest part of the question to fitly answer. I cannot tell you plainly it is because of this, or because of that, for I do not know; I can only guess, and guesswork is a very paltry way of getting out of the difficulty; to hazard helpless guesses is only wallowing deeper in the mire of uncertainty.

This seven days has shown me what I suspected from the first, that there exists, or has existed at some time of their acquaintance, a story which we outsiders know nothing of.

I never gave myself credit for being especially lynx-eyed in matters of this kind, never, perhaps, having had occasion to call them into operation; but it is plain as a pikestaff.

Collin has taken no small advantage of aunt's permission to come as often as he liked. He has indeed been here almost morning, noon, and night, and I can only conclude that he comes to see Lella.

Indeed, aunt hinted as much to me quite confidentially the other evening when he and she were singing that touching duet, "Come, wander love with me," while we listened, remarking what a handsome couple they made, and how admirably suited they were to each other; and then it struck me for the first time that perhaps aunt had asked her down to Gable End on purpose to marry her to Collin Broughton, that this was the concealed reason for her wishing Lella to come at once. If so, her wishes seem to be in a fair way of being realised.

Oh! what was it between those two! Can it be love? That they met, loved, and parted for some sorrowful reason, long long before I saw the brown eyes by the Marling river, and acted my *petite comédie* under the garbled branches of the hawthorn, older, perhaps, by a century than myself!

Oh! if it be really so, may they be quite happy, for I like Collin Broughton, like him very much indeed—as a friend, of course; and we were so very friendly until Lella came.

Now there seems a little shadow between us. Is it my fault or his? I wish I knew, that I could remedy it if possible, but somehow I never seem to get a chance of finding out what is amiss, for he leaves me in Michael's complete possession, and hob-a-nobs with Lella.

Another sore point with me, and one which I seemingly cannot resent or contradict, is that Lella will persist in pretending that Michael and are rapturously in love with each other.

I have argued with her privately on the subject, endeavouring to point out and make her comprehend that she is totally wrong; that I am not in love with Michael and never shall be.

All to no purpose, she will persist in designating and regarding us as ardent lovers, to my intense annoyance.

Only yesterday we were all standing, watching a brood of fluffy-backed ducklings taking to the pond in the orchard, while the mother cackled and remonstrated with puffed feathers on the edge of the bank—I and Michael, she and Collin.

As we turned first away from the pond, they following us behind, I overheard her say in a stage whisper to her companion, having evidently indicated as in the foreground,—

"What a sweet thing 'Love's young dream is.' How devoted those two are to one another. It's really quite refreshing to witness something like real love in these days, one meets it so seldom. Don't you think so?"

Now I am not at all devoted to Michael; in fact, there are times of late when I have felt tempted to hate him, myself, Lella, and everyone else in their turn.

Hearing this encomium upon our supposed loves, I felt a savage instinct to turn sharply round there and then, and defying etiquette, give

her a bit of my mind; but second thoughts, which they say are always best, showed me how undignified a proceeding this would be. Besides, what did it matter after all!—though I strained my ears to catch Colin's answer.

"I suppose it is," he said, quietly, in his ordinary tone of voice, neither higher nor lower than usual. "I'm not much judge of these matters myself."

"You used to be," she went on, low-voiced. "Used I!" he retorted, quite aloud. "Ah! I was young and foolish then, I suppose"—with a laugh—"I have put away all childish things now, done with all the frivolities of the tender passion!" to which she made no reply.

But I noticed that after this speech of Lella's, Colin seemed purposely to leave me to Michael as my lawful and particular Lubin. Once or twice I caught him looking at me penetratingly with those clear brown eyes of his, as much as to ask me if it were true; and was he not good in taking Lella off our hands as an unwelcome third! But by that time my stubborn, rebellious heart had taken umbrage, and so I let him think what he chose, with no word of mine to undeceive him.

Last night I looked at my silver aspexence, reposing in the velvet drawer of my dressing-case.

"Little aspexence!" I began, taking it out of the drawer and laying it in the palm of my hand, gazing at it with eyes not far removed from the region of tears. "If you are going to make me feel so miserable I shall wish I had never seen your shining little face, and I don't want to do that yet—not just yet awhile. I was so proud of you when I earned you. Don't make me unhappy, please—please don't."

By this time there were two big tears, one in each eye, dimming my sight, and making my aspexence look blurred and indistinct. I must not cry. Why should I! It is so horribly foolish, and about nothing too—absolutely nothing—I kept on saying over and over again to myself. One thing I determined on, and that was, that I would fling away all melancholy, and from then show myself happy and jolly once more—the cricket, Celia Lascallies, of yore.

This afternoon we are all going over to help in a school treat, given at East Marling Rectory, after which we shall spend the evening at the Barlows, and I mean to carry my excellent resolve into early execution, flinging dull care away.

On arriving we find a concourse of village children assembled in the meadow adjoining the Rectory garden, part of Mr. Barlow's glebe land, engaged in games of varying and entrancing delights, watched over by smiling school teachers, Mr. Barlow, Miss Hannah, and Colin Boughton. Lella and I join in "Here we go round the blackberry bush," "post," and "Tom Tiddler's ground," to the manifest and unconcealed delight of the children, and frequent hand-clappings from Colin, looking on.

At last, tired and hot, Lella comes and flings herself down on the grass under a big purple beech, near the spectators, and Miss Hannah walks me off to help her cut up cake for the tea, which is one of the greatest glories of the whole afternoon.

She gives me a cake knife and huge china dish to put the cake on when cut in thick wedges, while she tackles another of equally large dimensions.

"My dear little Celia," she begins, as we sit by the long tea-table, covered with good things suitable for the children's palates, "what have you done to Colin?"

Her question takes me so aback for the moment that I cease cutting the cake, and, knife in hand, gaze wide-eyed at my questioner.

"I, Miss Hannah! What have I done to Mr. Boughton?"

"Yes, you," smiling at my evident surprise. "What have you said or done to Colin?"

"Nothing. That is, nothing that I know of," I amend, nervously, for perhaps unwittingly I may have said or done something which has vexed him. "What could I do?" eagerly watching her face for an answer.

"That is what I want to know, you naughty

little thing," shaking her white head at me. "I am certain you have been unkind to poor Colin."

"Why, what is the matter with him? He looks well enough," I say, thinking how merrily he laughed a little while back when Lella and I were playing at "Tom Tiddler's ground" with the school-children. He did not seem out of spirits when he clapped his hands in approval.

"Ah! dear, when you are as old as I am you will have learnt that looks do not always tell tales. The world is taught to wear a mask very often, believe me, and we should never judge a smile according to its sweetness, or a laugh for its mirthful clime. Colin has said nothing to me, but I have studied young people too much not to know that there is something 'rotten in the state of Denmark.' He has been quite glum the last few days, doing nothing but whiffing at his cigarettes or mooning up and down the river when he has not been at Gable End. All his usual powers of conversation seem to have left him, and he's always in a day-dream. Now, it's quite unlike Colin, and there must be a reason for it all. Now, what do you say is the matter with him?" and she glances from under her spectacles over the table at me.

I have always been so open with dear Miss Hannah, telling her my small secrets, woes, and troubles, that it comes quite naturally to me to confide my thoughts into her safe and sympathetic keeping, so I look back at her kindly old face, and say quietly,—

"I think I know what is the matter with Mr. Boughton. He is—in love!"

"Oh!" she rejoins, dropping her gaze to the cake she is cutting up, "is that it! So he has already confided in you as to what ails him!" with a slightly amused smile.

"No"—shaking my head dolefully—"no, he did not confide in me. I found it out by myself," and I heave a small, unobtrusive sigh as I carve away at the plum cake before me.

"Clever little Celia. So you found it out, did you? Now, to tell you the truth, I fancied it was that for the last week, only I was not sure about it."

My heart gives a sink downward, for until this moment I have hardly realised the truth of my own thoughts. Miss Hannah's assertion that it has been visible to her eyes quenches the last spark of doubt hitherto remaining in my mind. It is all as clear as the noonday now. Aunt will have her way.

"I wonder now if you know who Colin is in love with?" queries Miss Hannah, after a pause, piling up the wedges of cake in a pyramid form, and keeping a steadfast gaze on the dish of richness before her.

"Yes, I know that too," I answer, with ever so small a heart pang; "it is Lella."

"Lella Neville!" she repeats, glancing up quickly at me, as if questioning whether I really meant what I said. For one second I fancy she intends contradicting me, but I am mistaken, for she only says meditatively, as if conning over the question in her mind's eye. "Oh, so you think Colin is in love with Lella Neville, do you?"

"Yes. I am almost sure of it, Miss Hannah!"

"Well, now, strange to say, I can't agree with you, dear Celia, at all. It does not strike me that Colin's heart is gone in that direction in the slightest degree. Of course I may be wrong, but I do not think so," adjusting her spectacles over her eyes.

"Not. Why, I quite made up my mind on that score."

"So you have thought about it then!" she queries once more, with a twinkle of merriment coming into her sweet old face.

"Oh, yes! ever so many times," I assent, quickly. "You see, they knew each other before they met at Gable End after Lella came down to stay with us, and somehow I cannot help thinking they must have been lovers. I cannot exactly tell you why I think so, but I do," lifting my gaze from the table-cloth, which I have been studying attentively, while I spoke.

"My dear little girl, if, as you say, they were lovers once upon a time, that is all the more reason why they should not be so now, especially as time has come between, and let me tell you

there is nothing in all this wide world so difficult to take up again as a broken thread. I cannot fancy Colin's heart broken about your friend Lella Neville—she is hardly his style. I should have thought. But I must get poor Colin in a confessional mood some day, and hear all about it from him. I am sure he will tell me if I ask him; only, as a rule, I never like to force young people's confidences. If they like to enlighten me, well and good; if not, I do not evince any overweening curiosity to hear. I find it's always better to let them alone in that kind of thing. But I confess I should never have thought what you say was correct."

"Can you doubt it, Miss Hannah. Look there!" and I direct her attention to the distant purple beech-tree, where Lella, lying on the grass, near where Michael and Mr. Barlow sit chatting, looks up at Colin leaning his broad back against the trunk of the tree, fanning her with a huge dock leaf tied on the end of a willow twig—his attitude of devotion, Lella's upturned glowing face.

Surely—surely they are lovers.

As I look Colin turns his head in our direction, perhaps with some vague instinct that he is being watched, for instinct sometimes does warn us in this manner. Seeing both our heads turned towards them, he stops his fanning, evidently says something to Lella, who, springing to her feet, they both saunter over to us at the tea-table. I have finished my cake-cutting as they reach us, and laying the knife down, fold my hands in my lap.

"How industrious you are, Miss Celia; how those children will presently bless your labours. And what enormous appetites they must be endowed with to be able to consume all the goodies set out for them. Are you too tired to come and have a swing; my muscles require exercise, they have not had any work for a long time now," he ends almost platonically, I think.

I flush up with pleasure, and am about to assent joyfully, when my eyes fall on Lella. She has heard the proposition, and evidently does not approve of it. The corners of her mouth droop, and a peculiar expression in her eyes says quite as plainly as words, "I don't wish my lover to swing anyone but myself. There must be no trespassers on my preserves."

I should love a swing above all things, and I should like Colin to swing me, but would it be fair to Lella? Perhaps not.

With a small sigh to myself, I answer staidly,—

"Thanks, very much indeed, but I don't think I'll have a swing just now. It's—it's too hot!" casting about for a valid excuse, anything better than none.

His face falls—that at least I am sure of. He is disappointed. I wish now I had said yes! despite Lella's mute dissent. Having said no, however, I must, of course, abide by it.

Then Lella's clear voice says flippantly,—

"You need not have taken the trouble to ask, Mr. Boughton. Don't you know that Celia never cares for anyone to swing her but Michael; it's a vested right. Now I adore swinging quite as much as she does, and I am more amenable, for I don't mind a jolt who swings me, so you can exercise your muscles on my behalf. I don't suppose it will make the slightest difference so long as they are exercised, will it?" clasping her plump hands together fervorously under his gaze.

"No, not if you wish it," he answers, somewhat shortly though, I fancy; and without another pro or con the two saunter away towards the orchard where that entrancing swing hangs from the walnut, rearing its giant head above the punier pear and apple-trees, laden with their green fruit, leaving Miss Hannah and me once more *tête à tête* by the long tea-table.

My body stays behind truly, but something belonging to me—my heart, perhaps—goes with them. Reluctantly I watch those two retreating figures until they turn into that lattice gate. How dearly should I have liked to go too; but, at any rate, I ought to feel a wholesome consolation that I have done my duty.

I awake from my cogitations to find Miss

Hannah regarding me inquisitively over her spectacles.

"Why didn't you let Colin swing you, dear!" she asks gently.

"Because—oh, because—well, I don't know," smoothing the frills of my sleeve.

"He was quite disappointed at your refusal."

"Do you really think he was?" I query, eagerly, my face flushing up.

"Of course I do. I am sure he wanted to swing you very much. I think you acted under a wrong impression in refusing, unless you did not care to be swung."

"Oh, but I did care, Miss Hannah," I respond, quickly; "there's nothing I should have liked better, only—only—" hesitating.

"Only what, you queer morsel of feminine contrariety!" she says, smiling.

"I thought he would prefer swinging Lelia!" I confess, honestly.

"You very silly little Celia!" she says, again, rising from her seat, and coming over to my side, lays one hand caressingly on my shoulder.

"Now, do you know what I should do if I were in your place?"

"What?" I ask, looking up into her face, and thinking what a blessing it is to be old and tender and sympathetic all at once. When I am old may I be just such a dear old lady as Miss Hannah is.

"Well, were I you, I should just get up from my chair, walk over the meadow to the garden orchard, and ask Colin to swing me."

"Would you?" eagerly; "but, perhaps, he might not care to now, after being once refused!" I end, dubiously, all my fears returning.

"I don't fancy he would. At any rate, I should try. No never hurts anyone; and, remember, nothing drops pat into our mouths without the asking. Now, take my advice. Come, off with you"—as I hesitate—"while I go and see what Stephen and your cousin are chattering about," and, giving me a gentle push, away she trots in the opposite direction.

I stand irresolute a minute or two, wishing so much to follow her advice, and yet not liking to. It is not the matter of eating humble pie one atom which lies uppermost in my mind, and affects my resolution. It is not pride which creates this horrible vacillation; but the remembrance of the old adage, "two is company, three none." I have found out the truth of it myself, and I wish to do unto others as I would be done by. And yet Miss Hannah's advice is very pleasant to contemplate. Shall I, or shall I not? Helplessly indecisive, I appeal to nature by picking a golden buttercup growing near, and pluck the yellow, shiny petals off one by one, as Gretchen did, murmuring yes! no! as each petal falls to the earth.

Momentous flower, tell me true, shall I go or stay?

The buttercup finally says yes, which means I am to go, so flinging away the robbed floweret and stem, I walk slowly forward towards the lattice gate. Lelia and Colin are so engrossed as I reach the other side of the walnut-tree that they give no heed to me, nor hear my footsteps over the soft, long grass. He is not swinging her—though she sits idly in the swing—but standing close, holding one of the chains which support the swing, looking at her, while she gazes up into those brown eyes of his, seemingly unmindful of aught else on the glorious summer day.

It is a pretty picture, say what one would. It may not be a pleasant or agreeable picture, but it is certainly a pretty one, and I recognise the fact with almost a heart pang. How true it is that "two is company!" Am I to be a marring third, and spoil the harmonious duet?

She seems to be asking him something by her attitude of eagerness, or answering some question of his—the momentous question of all others, perhaps. More than likely I should say—then, I see her suddenly raise one of her hands lying in her lap and lay it on his arm holding the chain, with a kind of beseeching gesture.

He lets it lie there one moment, then takes it gently in his other hand, and lays it again on her lap.

They are lovers, I knew it, I was certain of it. No, I will not disturb them, far better not; they will only hate me in their hearts for my unwelcome intrusion upon their bliss. Besides, Colin would not care to swing me now.

Lovers—lovers—I echo to myself, with a heart-throb, as I turn silently away from the old walnut shade, and pass again through the lattice door into the garden, where I wander up and down aimlessly for a few minutes longer, and then go in search of Miss Hannah, for the children's tea will be ready, I should think, and she will want help.

"Prue!" I say, when night comes, and I am once more in my Gable End bedroom, with the door well shut to; "let me cry. My heart aches so, I must cry the ache away;" and, laying my head on her ample, cotton-covered breast, I shed a few bitter tears.

"My dear Miss Celia! what's to do!" she asks, smoothing my roughened hair, letting me cry in peace, for she is used to my vagaries and changes of temperament. "There now, surely you've cried enough! Dry your eyes, my dearie; you're right tired, that's it, playing about with all them children in the sun. Get into bed, my chicken, and go to sleep, you're right tired, I can see."

With a sob or two I dry my eyes, and raise my head.

"Yes, Prue! I'm tired, very tired, indeed. That's it. A good night's rest will set me all right again—rest and sound sleep. My head aches, not my heart. I said heart I know, but I meant head. Yes! I am very, very tired, dear old Prue, you are right."

When she has gone I jump out of bed, and patter to the window, across which hangs a chintz curtain. I draw it back, and look out into the night—the moon has hardly risen yet, and all the garden lies in shadow, like my heart, I think, sorrowfully—gazing out at the infinite calmness and silent softness of the summer night.

"No, Celia," I commence, sadly, you are not tired, not a bit. "It is not weariness which causes you to shed tears so childishly. Be very sure of that. Come, now, be honest with yourself. Own the truth to your heart of hearts. You are not tired; you are—jealous!"

The very night seems to echo my thought. Jealous, Celia, it cries plainly enough, and I know it speaks truly. It is as true as that morn, noon, and dewy eve come round in ceaseless turn; what can be surer than that until eternity! Ah, Colin! I wish you had never come, or Lelia had never come, it matters not much which, and I do wish I wasn't such a horribly, disgracefully jealous girl, and a chilly one, too, by the bye.

Midnight meditation, lightly garbed as I am, is not, I find, conducive to warmth; and I believe I hear a mouse nibbling in the wainscot. I hate mice. I hope he won't come out for his evening stroll before I get back into bed; horrid little nibbler!

With a tiny shiver I draw the curtain once more, and kneels down into the depths of my four-poster. Jealousy does not make me any braver than I was, I find, and though I am only a country mouse myself, I do not love my species as I ought. That nibbler shall have a nice little trap set for him to-morrow. I'll have that mouse, though I can't have Colin, at least I mean to try—for the mouse, of course. I'm not so sure I'd have Colin, even if I could. I don't think I would, but I am not sure. One can never be sure of anything, seemingly, in this world; and one's own heart least of all. At least, I find it so.

(To be continued.)

A WELL-KNOWN curio expert states that there are factories in Europe for the manufacture of all kinds of works of art that are likely to attract the collector. Modern articles of china are stamped with old marks so cleverly that even experts have been deceived, says the *Pottery Gazette*. Arms and armour are treated with acids which eat away the metal, thus producing the same effect as the ravages of time.

STAUNCH AND TRUE.

—10—

(Continued from page 564.)

Not a word was said about Lola's marriage to Colonel Mowbray, who never intruded himself upon her notice, thus tacitly breaking off the projected match.

But even Lola, badly as she had acted, was to be comforted in a surprising way. A letter came to tell her that the dead had returned to life—that the husband she had mourned in secret and had truly loved was on his way home; he had been missing only, and had effected his escape from captivity, and was now a captain.

The mistake had arisen in the despatches, because none of the convey of which Lieutenant Kingsford was in charge had ever been seen alive again, trustworthy reports stating that all had been killed.

Following close upon the heels of the letter came the writer himself; and oh! what joy it was for him to clasp both wife and child to his brave young heart, and to bask in her sunny smiles! Not a word of the past ever reached his ears; it was a family skeleton, and as such kept locked in the cupboard and jealously guarded.

Captain Kingsford was best man at the wedding, and Lola never thought he had looked so handsome in his uniform, on the breast of which there dangled the much-coveted distinction of the Victoria Cross.

Hardly had the honeymoon been over than Mrs. Swindon joined the great majority, mourned by all who knew her true worth.

When the will was read Phyllis Findlay was bequeathed the whole of her immense fortune, with the exception of a legacy of ten thousand pounds to Lola's son. As they say it never rains but it pours, the Chancery suit was declared in her favour, and she became one of the richest women in England.

Richard Ward emigrated to Australia, and Mrs. Quelch died in the workhouse, her end having been hastened by strong drink.

Lola learned to bear her disappointment bravely; the love of her husband and children more than compensated for the loss of a great inheritance.

On the first anniversary of Phyllis's wedding the whole family were gathered at Swindon Park to do honour to the occasion. When Phyllis got the opportunity she called Lola aside, and the pair adjourned to her boudoir.

"Are you happy, Lola?" she asked. "Do you not miss something?"

"No; my husband is devoted to me, and my children are treasures beyond price!" was the smiling reply.

"Now, dear sister, I am about to make restitution—to give you back nearly all of your aunt's fortune, keeping only Swindon Park in memory of her. Not a word, please; you would not have lost it if I had been firmer, and not taken that foolish vow. Bertram and I put our heads together, and waited and watched to see how you would bear your great disappointment. You have done so nobly, and atoned for the past!"

"Phyllis, how can I ever repay you for all your devotion and sisterly love?"

"By doing as I intend to do—never have a secret from those you love—never place wealth before happiness and domestic joy. Then, and only then, can we hope to escape from the relentless grip of disappointed ambition."

The Dowager Lady Findlay, who had been sitting in an alcove unobserved, came forward with solemn earnestness and said—

"Amen!"

Sir Bertram rose to eminence in political life; Captain Kingsford attained to high rank in his profession, honoured by his country, beloved by his men, but never suspecting that once his happiness had well-nigh been wrecked by his wife's secret, from which alone Phyllis, ever staunch and true, saved them.

[THE END.]

IN THE WAY.

—302—

"MERCY on me! how you startled me! I declare you are always in the way!"

Mrs. Eliza Hannaway had gone to the window in the half-light of an autumn afternoon, merging into evening, and on drawing the heavy curtain, a little figure that had been curled up in the corner of the deep window-seat started up.

"I was reading."

"Reading! Tennyson!—no, Shakespeare! You are always fooling away your time."

Then Alma flushed out—

"You won't let me do anything else with it. I would like to help any of you, but you won't let me."

"I should think not, indeed. We don't want anything spoiled."

Alma, taking up her book, went meekly to her own room.

There were four Misses Hannaway—Eliza, Matilda, Agnes and Alma—but the oldest three looked upon Alma as an intruder, a wail, a burden thrown upon them most unwarrantably.

Their mother was a Haynes, who had doubled their father's income when she married him. They were all handsome women, and notable housewives. Little Alma's mother was nobody—a girl who stood in a shop.

After the first Mrs. Hannaway died there was never any deficiency in the housekeeping; the widower's wardrobe was kept in spotless order, and all Ridgewood wondered at the capacity of the three girls.

But, like their mother, they were smart, active, bustling, but without any of the softness that vents itself in caresses and tender words.

They loved their father in their own hard fashion, but they had a sort of contempt for his gentleness, his quiet ways, and his tender heart.

When he married a mite of a blue-eyed girl, they were ferocious, and when baby Alma had the audacity to appear, their wrath knew no bounds.

Very soon the little wife dropped under the continual ill-temper and fault-finding, and faded away, meekly and uncomplainingly, as she had lived. Then the father took the wee babe into his heart of hearts. For seventeen years the two were inseparable.

A close student, devoted to books, Mr. Hannaway found keen delight in training Alma's quick intellect, and leading her along the dry paths of knowledge, made delightful by loving converse and clear explanation.

Being a man of moderate fortune, Mr. Hannaway allowed his older children all the privileges of society, and his pleasant country seat was a favourite resort for young people. Sultors came, but went away. There was something about the three handsome, smart girls that did not attract lovers, and when their father died they were all still unmarried.

If they had never loved Alma before, be sure it added nothing to their affections to find their father's will left her an equal fourth of his estate.

They felt themselves defrauded, her mother having added nothing to their father's property, but they were too polite to turn the child away, though they made her feel herself an intruder every hour.

Utterly desolate when her father was taken away, Alma turned to her books and her music for comfort, shutting herself in the library for hours, reading or practising upon the piano that was her last birthday gift from her father.

"I do not care to go into the parlour whenever I want you to play for me, darling," he said, "so we will have a music-box of our own in the library."

And the library was now her very own. Every article it contained was left to her in her father's will, and she could feel that here, at least, she had a right to be.

But books and music, after all, will not feed a starving heart, and Alma drooped and faded visibly.

There was never a day when she was not made to feel that she was not welcome in her father's

house, and a favourite form of torture was to taunt her with her mother's poverty, and remind her that she had no right to money that came from the Haynes estate.

Yet, although they gave her but little peace in her life, the sisters met in most indignant council one morning over a little note:

"I am going away where no one will tell me every day that I am 'in the way.' Mr. Carter will send me my quarterly payments, and see to my business. I will never trouble you again."

"ALMA."

Mr. Carter, Alma's guardian, would give no information as to her whereabouts, but introduced the family lawyer and had a settlement made of Mr. Hannaway's estate, that gave Alma certain houses in a neighbouring city, and other property amounting to a fourth of the fortune left the sisters. The library was emptied, and its contents, with those of Alma's room, stored away.

It was useless to rage; the terms of the will were plain, and Alma disappeared from her home, while her guardian took strict care of her interests.

"Bless me! What can the coach be stopping here for!" cried old Mrs. Hunter, taking off her glasses and staring at the unwonted apparition at the gate.

"Stopping here!" said Tom, a tall, fine-looking farmer of thirty-five or six. "Sure here it is, and a little lady getting out, another!"

"Oh, Tom!"

The exclamations fell from both as they caught sight of the lady's face, and a moment later both whispered, softly,—

"Helen!"

"It must be Alma, Tom," the old lady said, bustling to the door. And a moment afterwards Alma was folded close in a motherly embrace, feeling hot tears dropping on her face as a tender voice said,—

"You must be Helen's little girl come to see her grandmother at last."

"Yes," she answered. "May I stay? I will not give you any trouble."

"Trouble!" cried Tom. "You could not give us trouble. It will be like having Helen back again."

And with the welcome a new life opened for Alma. The farm was very small; the house old, shabby, and poorly furnished; but her grandmother and her uncle could not sufficiently show their love for the pale child who appealed to them so strongly.

In this atmosphere of love, in the pure, sweet air, Alma gained health and new beauty, and Tom, smiling regularly, noticed that Charlie Willard, the young lawyer of Tent Haven, found a great deal of business in the immediate vicinity of Hunter's Farm.

"That young city chap that has set up in the village is uncommon fond of milk, mother," Tom would say.

"I saw Alma carry out a tumbler full four times to-day;" or, "What can a young lawyer find so very interesting in feeding hens. I saw young Willard twice at the hen-house when Alma was feeding the poultry."

But Alma did not heed the mild teasing. A new, glorious happiness opened to her when Charlie Willard joined her in her walk or stopped at the farm.

A man of twenty-five or six, he had been a close student, had travelled at home and abroad, was cultured and refined. He had met many fair girls, but never one so sweet and gentle as this little maiden who was the grandchild of old Mrs. Hunter.

He wondered sometimes when she fully comprehended a Latin quotation, or spoke with easy familiarity of the works of German and French authors, but Alma was reticent about her past life, and Charlie, who had been but a year or two at Tent Haven, never doubted that her life had been passed at the old farm.

Love's Young Dream glided the long winter evenings and glorified the opening of spring.

It was a quiet wooing. Uncle Tom keeping watch over his darling, grandmother gently sympathetic, and Charlie entirely devoted.

But with the summer days there came a change. Charlie came less and less to the farm, and, when there, was quiet and dull, never chatting in the old, bright way, nor planning for the future, with half hints of his hope as to who would share it. Alma wondered; Tom grimly watched for a chance to ask an explanation; grandmother was sure the poor fellow was ill.

But one June day, when Alma was in the woods trying to still the dull pain at her heart, by getting very tired, Charlie Willard joined her.

"Alma," he said, gently taking her cold, trembling hands in his own, "I was going to run away, like a miserable coward, but I have resolved to speak out. I must go away, because my life here has become unbearable!"

She tried to speak, but no words would come.

"Oh," he said, with almost a groan, "do not let me think I make you unhappy, too! Listen, darling—you are my darling, my heart's love, Alma! When I was trying by every device to win your heart, I was a rich man. I thought I could take my bride to a luxurious home, give her all money could buy for her, take all care from her life. But I have lost everything at one blow. My lawyer writes me that the investments involving all my property have proved absolutely ruinous. I must work my way to even competency, and I cannot ask you to bear the burden of poverty with me."

"Yet I will be your wife," was Alma's answer, "if you will let me share your life and your troubles."

"But, dearest, I have nothing. My practice here is a mere farce, and I must go where there is a thicker population, and earn my bread."

"Let me go with you."

And to Charlie's amazement, Mrs. Hunter and Tom repeated Alma's wish.

"My niece cannot meet her own modest expenses," Tom said, "and she loves you. I am sure she will be a help and not a burden."

And Charlie, dearly loving the sweet girl, gladly made her his wife. He scarcely understood himself, though Alma could have told him, how G—— came to be selected as the city of their future residence; but on a lovely evening in July the young couple found themselves upon the platform of the G—— Station, and Alma gave a cabman some directions in a low voice.

"We are going to a friend's," she told Charlie.

"Hotel bills are formidable."

The "friend's" house was a handsome one, evidently newly furnished. Two servants were in the hall; the open door of a dining-room showed a tempting repast already spread.

Drawing her husband into the drawing-room, Alma for the first time told him the story of her life.

"The houses that Mr. Carter secured for me proved to me very valuable, and he has bought this one for me, and invested a handsome sum in secure investments for me. This is our own house, Charlie, and I trust we shall find happiness here. I am sure, darling, you will never let me feel that I am 'in the way' here."

Charlie's answer need not be recorded.

It was ten years later when Mrs. Eliza Hannaway said to a dear friend:

"Yes, the Hon. Charles Willard's wife is our step-sister, not our own sister. She was a miserable, whining thing who cheated us out of our father's property, and I never could guess what anyone saw to admire in her. She was always 'in the way' here, and after running away she never let us hear anything about her till she sent wedding cards."

It is a common experience among mountain-climbers to find butterflies lying frozen on the snow, and so brittle that they break unless they are very carefully handled. Such frozen butterflies on being taken to a warmer climate recover themselves and fly away. Six species of butterflies have been found within a few hundred miles of the North Pole.

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER LII.

ALL the country-side was aslir before the dawn had broken.

Sir Edward Somerville had been roused from his slumbers by the sleepy-eyed butler, who told him that Miss Maynard and none of the gentlemen had returned, and Deepden Chase was in flames.

He ordered a horse to be got ready, and scrambled out of bed, telling his wife, as a natural precaution, that there was not the slightest cause for alarm.

As he rode down the road at a smart trot, Peter told him that they had made a mistake about the fire—it was not at Deepden Chase but at "Nun's Tower."

"Then I've frightened myself for nothing!" he exclaimed, in vexation. "Miss Maynard can't be there—she must have stayed at Mrs. Arkwright's."

"Beg pardon, sir, but if the young gentlemen saw it in flames, they couldn't a-bear to pass it by. Such interest as they always took in it, too! Maybe Miss Maynard was obliged to go with them, for they couldn't well leave her behind."

"I'll give them a piece of my mind," the Baronet muttered to himself; but when he got to Nun's Tower, and the crowd made way for him in solemn silence, a strange misgiving came over him.

Before him was the shell of the blackened ruin, but to the left there was a group, composed of Vere, Maltavers, Jack Arkwright, and a few others, all standing round "something" which was lying on the grass.

He threw his reins to the groom, and swung himself heavily to the gravel.

All turned and looked at him as if their tongues were tied, and, with a queer feeling in his heart, he walked slowly forward.

"What is it, for Heaven's sake!" he said, hoarsely, looking from one to the other of the haggard faces round him.

Then Vere said, gravely,—

"Your nephew has had an accident."

"He's not dead!" said Sir Edward, hastily, his face growing purple before it paled.

"No, but his spine is injured."

"My poor, poor boy!" and pushing Vere on one side, he looked down with sorrowing eyes on the man whom he had treated like a son.

Nella was still there, fixed to his side, because Godfrey, in a moment of consciousness, had clutched her dress; but he did not seem to notice her.

Tears gathered under his eyelids, as he thought of the noble career which had lain before his nephew—the husband of his daughter and the future master of Somerville. What was he doing in that deserted hole? What business had he to risk his life for people of whom he knew nothing?

"Why—why was he here?" looking round for information.

"Because of his sister," said Vere, briefly.

"Heaven bless my soul! she died a century ago!"

"She died in his arms, to-night," pointing to Maltavers.

"You here!" in a tone of cold disgust. "You dare to tell me that my niece has been hidden here for all these years?"

"Yes, Sir Edward, but not by me. I only found her to-night!" said Victor, firmly.

"If this poor boy could speak he would tell you that that was an infernal lie, sir! He was fond of her, and he hunted for her in every corner of England."

"Maltavers's life depended on her being found, you must remember that," put in Cyril.

"And who bid her—who buried her alive, like a thing ashamed to be seen?"

"Ask your nephew when he is better. He can tell you all."

"But he won't be better," his voice quavering.

"That fellow would not dare to show his face if he wasn't dying."

"You are mistaken, Sir Edward; and I hope some day, soon, you will do me justice," said Victor quietly. "Come away, Jack, this is no place for us."

He went up to the spot where he had laid Robin, took a long last glance at her white face, and slowly walked away.

Jack followed, and threaded his arm within his friend's, determined to carry him off to Deepden, so delighted and amazed was he at finding him again; and Victor went with him, eager to keep his promise to Dulcie, but feeling that a few drops of his overflowing cup of joy had been split by the hand of death!

"We must get him home," said Sir Edward, hastily; "but how are we to manage it?"

"The brougham is here," said Vere.

"Ah, that will do. Perhaps you will help me to carry him. You, child,"—touching Nella on the shoulder—"you seem to have more heart than anyone else, you can lift his head."

She stooped down, drew her dress gently from the stiff fingers, and then slowly—for her legs were cramped—got up from her knees.

The doctor, who had been summoned as soon as they found that Somerville's injuries were not mortal, interposed, and said that he and Captain Vere could carry the patient best without any further help.

Nella clung to Sir Edward's arm.

"Do you think he will die?" she whispered.

"No, my dear," huskily; "but he will be a cripple for life. Why bless me," clearing his throat, "here's the old brougham out, which I said might be broken up for rubbish, and Pearl, pretty creature, in the shafts! What's the meaning of this?"—to the driver, Godfrey's confidential groom.

He touched his hat.

"Master Godfrey's orders"—an answer that never failed to have its weight.

"She won't be steady enough now," with a sad shake of his head. "There must be no jolting for broken bones. Put him in here, Musgrave," going to the other brougham, which, fortunately, was a double one. "Miss Maynard, must go inside, and I on the box. The other poor thing must be brought to Somerville Hall. Will you and Vere take charge of her?"

Sarah Prendergast's body was removed to the "Red Ploughshare," where the inquest would be held. The blow on the head had killed her, so she was spared the melancholy sight of her beloved young master as a helpless cripple. Robin, after lying for a few days decked with flowers in one of the state bedrooms at Somerville Hall, was laid in the family vault, and Victor Maltavers, who had not ventured to join in the funeral train, came to the churchyard at night and laid a white rose from the Deepden conservatory on her grave, as a last token of the true and brotherly friendship which had been so fatal to her.

So, in spite of his wild wish to escape from the trammels of life, Godfrey Somerville did not die, but lived on a hopeless, helpless invalid, owing all the small happinesses of his ruined life to Meta's tender care. Every day of her existence she heaped coals of fire on his head, and was never so content as when she had been allowed to tire herself out in his service.

One day when Sir Edward was smoking his pipe by the side of his nephew's sofa, Godfrey plucked up his courage and disburthened his conscience.

The Baronet's hair stood on end with consternation; but when he had recovered his breath, he made this characteristic observation, stretching out his healthy sunburnt hand, and taking the invalid's, so white and thin, in his honest grasp,—

"My poor boy—we must all forgive you. How miserable it must have made you to be such a villain!"

Yes, they all forgave him, leaving his punishment in the hands of Heaven; and even Dulcie Arkwright rode up to the door one day with Victor Maltavers by her side, and asked after "poor Mr. Somerville."

Nella, meanwhile, was in bed with a serious

attack of congestion of the lungs, brought on by her long exposure to the cold night air whilst looking on at the flaming Tower.

Meta found it hard to spare the time to see after her, so engrossed was she in her care of the other invalid; but Lady Somerville was very kind, and Mrs. Partington, the housekeeper, who regarded nursing as her special province, watched over her like a second mother.

Her fever ran so high that she had to be kept as quiet as possible; and when she was a little better, and sufficiently herself to begin to worry her mind about friends or relations, Mrs. Partington, with conscientious regard for the doctor's injunctions, pretended to know nothing in answer to all her questions. Christmas passed without her knowing it, and New Year's Day was only marked by a change of medicine.

January was nearly over before she was allowed to leave her room—and even then she was only able to move into a little dressing-room on the other side of the corridor.

Meta looked in to congratulate her on her progress; but Nella felt as if she were laughing at her. Nothing is so depressing as to be just strong enough to know how very weak you are, and the poor girl felt inclined to cry.

"What is the news?" she asked, presently, when tired of hearing of Godfrey's symptoms. "I feel as if I had been dead and buried for two years at least."

"Only just six weeks!" said Meta, who was always provokingly accurate. "It was on the eighteenth of December that you were taken ill; on the thirtieth Dr. Musgrave said he was almost out of danger," her thoughts reverting immediately to the beloved object of all her wishes; "on the twelfth of January he was able to talk for more than five minutes at a time, and on the twenty-eighth he told my father all the troubles of his life."

"Did he? I am so glad."

"Are you? I am not; I wish they had been buried with poor Robin, and that all had have gone on without a word being breathed. You haven't heard of that article in the paper, crying up Mr. Maltavers as if he were a hero, and making poor Godfrey a fiend?"

"He won't mind anything now; the worst is over. Oh, Meta, dear!" her lips shaking, "how I have trembled for you."

"Don't tremble now," a beautiful light coming into her eyes as she knelt down by Nella's side. "It was hard at first, but it's all right now. And I have got him safe for all my life—no one will want to take him from me."

Nella put up her hand and stroked her hair.

"If only he had been just well enough to marry."

"I shall marry him. Do you think I would give him up?" the colour rushing into her face, "because he is so miserable? Why, that is just the reason why I can insist on being his wife! He can't ride, shoot, hunt, or even walk, so he must be glad to have me," her bosom heaving.

"Glad to have you, yes! But will your father and mother consent to such a sacrifice?"

"A sacrifice! As if I shouldn't be the proudest woman in England when I am Mrs. Godfrey Somerville!"

"Heaven grant you may be happy," said Nella, fervently, wondering at the devotion with which Godfrey had inspired her.

"I have no fear," said Meta, brightly. "I could almost find it in my heart to be glad that he is ill, that I may do my little best to serve him. Time for his quinine, I must be off!"

And she went out of the room so quickly that Nella had no time to ask her when Cyril Vere started for India. "Next month" he had said at breakfast on that Monday before the memorable ball; and she had never heard of Lady Kenderley's remonstrance, or of the letter which had been burnt in consequence.

CHAPTER LIII.

It was Dulcie Arkwright's wedding-day, and the chilly sunshine of February had rarely looked down on a lovelier bride.

In the old grey church, where she had been

christened as a child, she stood by the side of Victor Maltravers and his father. Sir John was close behind, a second youth having come to him with the happiness of his son. As far as mortal eyes could see, a perfect future lay before them, and there was not a doubt in the breast of either to mar their faith in each other. They had both been "tried in the fire," and not found wanting. And the long hopeless parting had only made them the gladder to be together.

Cyril Vere, the faithful friend of both, acted as best man, and kept his spirits up to the proper pitch by a desperate flirtation with the head bridesmaid, whom he pretended to admire immensely.

"She's not a patch on Miss Maynard," said Jack, with a shrug of his shoulders.

Cyril agreed with him, but did not think it necessary to say so. After the breakfast was over Victor took him on one side, and asked him if there was anything on earth he could do for him.

"Nothing."

"But I owe you everything," sleeping him on the back, "and I don't want to be in debt to you all my life. I wish you would marry your cousin—and let me be your banker."

"You don't owe me anything. It's so awfully jolly to see you all right, without those confounded whiskers. You might leave them to me, perhaps, as a legacy."

Victor's face grew grave as he remembered when they were lost. "Old man, it isn't friendly of you. You might let a brother help you."

But Cyril shook his head with a smile.

As soon as the bride and bridegroom had started, of course in profound secrecy, for Paris, Cyril asked for his horse, and rode off towards Somerville Hall.

Nella was lying on the sofa, in the small room upstairs, feeling depressed and unhappy. Godfrey had not been so well that day, so Meta had been too much engrossed to spare her any of her company; she had therefore been obliged to depend on Mrs. Partington for any details of the wedding which the housekeeper had been able to glean from Mary Abbot, the upper housemaid who was engaged to James Simmons, the Arkwright's head-groom.

Vere's name was not mentioned, which did not surprise her, as she had long ago made up her mind that he was on his road to India.

When she was growing tired of the splendours of the bridesmaids' dresses, Mrs. Partington suddenly remembered that Nella had not had her tea, and bustled downstairs to see after it. When she was gone Nella subsided into gloomy reflections.

If Godfrey Somerville were to become a constant inmate of the house as Meta's husband she knew that she must look out for another home. After what had passed between them, above all, after the attempt at an elopement, she felt it would not be right for her to stay under the same roof with him.

Of course he might be changed in mind as in body, but it was only fair to him to go, when it was impossible for him to do anything but stay.

To go—but where? Back to Elstone, to that silent, desecrated Mrs. Vere, who seemed to think it wrong for a girl to laugh! Or out into the world, to face the insulting compassion of strangers! Her heart sank lower, right down into the depths.

Hark! there was a voice outside the door, which made her heart beat so fast that she could scarcely breathe.

"Is this the room? Thank you, I will announce myself."

A knock, to which she was too hurried to give an answer, and in walked Cyril Vere!

He came across the room with rapid strides, and caught her trembling hands in both of his.

"You look so ill, dear," he said, anxiously, as his eyes took in the vast change in her appearance; "have I frightened you?"

"I—I thought you had gone," she faltered, trying to steady her voice, but not succeeding, "sit down, and tell me why you haven't."

"Why, you couldn't think I should go without a word!"

"I did not know. I suppose," with a wistful look into his kindly face, which seemed, after the tedium of her illness, as refreshing as cool waters on summer days; "it is good-bye now."

"Not yet, unless you wish to get rid of me," with a smile. "When are you going to be strong? I can't bear to see you mewed up like this."

"I am in no hurry. When you are in India—I shall be where!"

"When I'm there I'll try to find out. I mustn't lose time. I only got leave for Victor's wedding, and am to be back at Aldershot the first thing to-morrow morning. Nell," bending his fair head a little nearer, "I had a message from Somerville the other day; he said he tried to get between us, but you wouldn't let him. Is that true?"

A soft pink rose in her pale cheeks, as her eyes drooped shyly.

"He tried to make me like him—but I didn't."

"And you never met him voluntarily—in out-of-the-way corners?"

"Never!"

"And that night in the boudoir?" fixing his eyes on her drooping face, as if a good part of his existence depended on her answer.

"He was going to kill himself before my eyes," shuddering at the remembrance; "but I promised to hold my tongue till after Tuesday, when he was to clear Mr. Maltravers and go away."

"And take you with him?" frowning resentfully.

"No, there was not a word about it. He begged me to be kind to him that last night, because it was the last. I couldn't explain," with a tiny smile, "and you wouldn't understand!"

"I was a fool, and so down in the month I was half beside myself. I wanted to hate you, but I stayed away from India on purpose to take care of you."

"You did! Oh, Cyril!" her eyes shining.

"Yes, and you said you wished I was gone. Don't apologise; I quite deserved it. Nell, I've behaved like a brute to you," his voice sinking, his face flushing. "I suppose you could never do anything but hate me!"

As he reddened she grew deathly white, and her heart began to beat tumultuously, but she said nothing, because it seemed impossible to make any sound come from her lips.

"Nell, I'm a poor man, with scarcely a copper in my possession, but I have hopes for the future, or I would never ask you to share it. Just tell me if you hate me!"

No answer; but as he stooped till his yellow moustaches almost brushed her cheek, a flicker of a smile crossed the lovely lips.

"Nell!" with sudden, breathless delight, "you don't mean that you like me?"

For all answer she laid her head upon his shoulder, and his heart felt as if it would burst with joy as he clasped his strong arms round her.

Hand in hand they sat together, all the past forgiven, in the sweet and tender happiness of the present. He knew that she had been faithful to him through doubt and mistrust; and she knew that his relations with Dulcie Arkwright had only been those of a loyal, true-hearted friend.

Hand in hand, as they meant to live through all the ups and downs of married life, without a secret that the other must not share, without a trouble that the love of each to each could not make less.

Time flew fast, because they could not stop to count it, and at seven o'clock Lady Somerville came in with a bland smile and said, "Of course, Captain Vere, you will stay to dinner!"

Cyril started up with a look of alarm, remembering that he had promised to dine at Deepden; but as that was impossible, and a hope was held out that he might be allowed to see Nella afterwards for a few minutes, he was easily persuaded to stay.

The news of the engagement flashed through the house, though nobody ever told it to anybody else.

Meta was pondering over it when she went

into Godfrey's room the next morning, with a bunch of violets in her hand. He was looking so white that a pang of fear shot through her heart.

"Don't you feel well?" she said, bending over him anxiously.

"Not particularly," with a sarcastic smile; "a cripple rarely does."

"Of course I only meant not worse. Shall I read to you?" not daring to present her little bunch.

"Not yet. Don't be angry, little woman, but I'm thinking. So Nella's going to take Vere for better or worse?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Look here, Meta!" speaking very slowly, "I shall never ride again, the doctor can't humbug me. You've got plenty of horses of your own, and could get more if you hadn't."

"Yes," she said, wonderingly.

"I should like her to have Pearl. Now go and tell her so."

"Pearl! You always said nothing on earth should induce you to part with her. Do you really mean it?"

"Yes," as an expression of pain flitted across his haggard face. "I have parted with everything—honour, and hope, and love—why should Pearl be the only thing left?"

"Not love!" kneeling down by the sofa, as the tears streamed from her eyes; "say—not love!"

"Yes, love!" he said, gloomily. "Nothing beyond a steady-going methodical affection is suitable for a log like me."

CHAPTER LIV., AND LAST.

NELLA was taken up to Chestersfield-gardens to be introduced to Lady Kindersley, whom she considered the dearest old lady under the sun. The attraction was mutual, and Lady Kindersley felt that she had secured Cyril Vere's happiness for ever, by making him burn that letter.

She adopted him formally as her son, and insisted on making a wedding present to Nella in the form of a substantial marriage settlement.

The wedding took place in the summer, when the garden was a bower of roses, and the sun never seemed tired of shining. It was a very quiet one, by Nella's wish, for she felt that anything in the shape of a festivity would be out of place in a house which was still saddened by the shadow of Godfrey's misfortune.

When the ceremony was over he sent for her, and she came at once, for now that he was a helpless prisoner his wish was a binding law to all, besides those who had always given in to him.

There was a chastened look of joy in the lovely eyes which met his so kindly, whilst the greeting which she had prepared died away on her lips.

He looked at her long, his pulses quickening once again at the sight of her grace and beauty. "Thank Heaven, I am not blind," he said hoarsely. "Kneel down, that I may touch you."

She dropped down on her knees, and bent forward, with a yearning desire to bring some peace and comfort to the spoilt life.

He raised his hand and gently stroked her soft cheek. "My pretty Nell, Vere's won, and I've lost," with a heavy sigh; "but if that fall hadn't handicapped me, I should have been in first. It's all right between us, though, and you don't owe me a grudge. Vere wouldn't let you kiss me, I suppose?"

She shook her head, remembering now that she belonged to her husband; but, out of pity, stooped her face and touched his hand with her lips. Then, without a word, she stole from the room, not knowing that Godfrey had faltered. In his weak state, the slightest emotion overpowered him.

The honeymoon was spent at Lady Kindersley's country house, which proved to be Coombe Lodge, the old place in Devonshire, which had once re-echoed to Robin's happy laughter, as she tried breathlessly to keep up with her brother's long strides.

Godfrey had been obliged to part with it in order to pay his debts, but he did so willingly,

as nothing would have induced him to set foot on the estate when his sister was no longer there to make the sunshine of the woods. Cyril and Nella, in the midst of their happiness, spared many thoughts of kindly regret for the former master, knowing that if he had sinned, he had also paid the penalty in his living death.

They were not surprised to hear that Sir Edward and Lady Somerville had given in to their daughter's wish, for how could they hold out against the two beings, whom they loved much better than themselves? Meta was made happy by being allowed to be a wife as well as a nurse.

The ceremony was performed by special license in the drawing room, with the October sun streaming in at the windows, and a glowing fire on the hearth. Meta was pale, but very happy. Godfrey was white as his own shirt-collar, but when he kissed his faithful little wife, unaccustomed tears were in his eyes, and the embrace was given with real affection.

Lady Kindersley, having been made happy for a year by the possession of a son who never disappointed her, thought it was time to die before anything else happened. She left him sole heir to all her immense property, and the penniless soldier found himself the owner of a large estate, together with a house in town.

Mrs. Vere shook her head, and sighed to think of her niece Eleanor and her son's wife developing into a woman of the world; but Nella was not spoiled by her good fortune, only so thankful to Heaven for His goodness that she wished to make other people as happy as herself.

And Robin slept in her quiet grave, hidden at last from all eyes—except her Maker's.

[THE END]

HOW A GREAT MUSEUM GREW.

It is curious how few Englishmen know anything of the remarkable museum attached to the Royal College of Surgeons, although it belongs to them as a nation. The original collection of specimens was the outcome of the life work of John Hunter, and a most readable account of this enthusiast and his hobby will be found in the September number of the *Windsor Magazine*. "Altogether he spent £70,000 in his own lifetime, every penny of which he made in practice during the day, and every penny of which he spent to buy material to examine during the night. 'D—n that guinea!' he used to say, as he rose unwillingly from his dissecting table to see a patient. He even used his own body for experiment, and inoculated himself with the virus of one of the most loathsome and fell diseases that afflict the flesh of man—to find out too late that he was mistaken. 'My life,' he said of himself in later days, 'is in the hands of any rascal who chooses to annoy or tease me.' In 1793, at the age of sixty-five, he dropped down dead at St. George's Hospital, after a heated discussion in which he had taken part, leaving a widow in a house in Leicester Square (demolished the other day) with a coach and horses, a retinue of forty servants and workmen, an invaluable collection on which he had spent £70,000 and his best brain, and not a penny else. It took six years—and, thanks to Sir Joseph Banks, the effort was successful—to convince the Government that here was something that ought to belong to the nation. 'What,' said Pitt, 'buy preparations! Why, I haven't money enough to buy gunpowder!' Ultimately, £15,000 was given, the collection was handed over to the custody of the Royal College of Surgeons, and £15,000 more was given wherewith to house it. A right good custodian the College has been; it has spent almost half a million in amplifying and completing Hunter's design."

BARTERING FOR A WIFE.

A VERY readable account of a summer visit to Nova Zemla is contributed to the September number of the *Windsor Magazine* by J. Russell-Jefferson. The primitive methods of the natives may be judged by the following: "The product of each man's hunting is taken to Archangel,

and an account in his name kept at the Bank. If he is poor or unlucky, the Governor helps him; if not, he gets his money, and can, through the Secretary, order what he wants up to his balance, which goods are brought to him next voyage. To show their income, for example, one—the champion hunter—on my visit had 700 roubles (£70) as the result of his year's work, and the least—a lazy, idle man—50 kopecks (1s.). Each, after the sale of his skin, was told his balance and allowed to buy. It was curious and most interesting to sit next to the Secretary, good-natured and patient, and hear him explain and minister to the wants of these children of Nature. Gunpowder, lead, tea, sugar, flour, china cups (a great delicacy), knives, salt, cloth, needles, dogs, snuff, tobacco, were the chief of the orders given. I heard one added a wife, and his order, which was serious, was booked by the Secretary, and next voyage the Governor sent him one, a girl from the Samoyed settlement on the Pettofoya. He was very pleased, but next time the boat called (the Governor told me this story at the English club at Archangel, when we were dining, and we roared over it) the Samoyed sent the girl back to the Secretary, with a message to the Governor that he must change this wife (as if she were a gun or a bale of merchandise) for another, as she was no good, too lazy, and a poor cook, and he refused to keep her; so the Secretary had to take the poor girl home, and another wife was sent him. This time, I heard, it was a success, perhaps because backed by the Governor's message that he would not change any wives sent, as a rule, again. This couple he sent on a honeymoon to Solovetski Monastery as a sort of example and pilgrimage."

In Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia there is a remarkably resonant wood called *hormiguilla*. The Quichua and Aymara Indians make a most excellent musical instrument out of this wood. It is on the principle of the well-known xylophone, only underneath each piece they construct a sounding box out of the same wood, varying in size to the note to be augmented and sustained. Some of these instruments are mounted on stands and have as many as forty-five tones. These large instruments are played by four and five operators. The tones are quite unlike those of the xylophone, as they are not short and sharp, but are sustained by the sounding boxes, so that at a short distance they give the impression more of an organ than even a piano. Expert operators play opera pieces and the latest music upon the large instruments with most remarkable effect. This instrument is said to be a very old one, tradition dating it back to the days of the Incas, being one of the few remaining evidences of the old pre-historic civilisations. A party of Peruvians lately travelled through Mexico with one of these large instruments and created quite a sensation among the music-loving Mexicans.

A MARVELLOUS TREE.—Undoubtedly the most marvellous tree in the world grows in Brazil. It is the *Carnahuba* palm, and can be employed for many useful purposes. Its roots produce the same medicinal effect as sarsaparilla. Its stems afford strong, light fibres, which acquire a beautiful lustre, and serve also for joists, rafters, and other building materials, as well as for stakes for fences. From parts of the tree wines and vinegar are made. It yields also a saccharine substance, as well as a starch resembling sago. Its fruit is used in feeding cattle. The pulp has an agreeable taste, and the nut, which is oleaginous and emulsive, is sometimes used as a substitute for coffee. Of the wood of the stem musical instruments, water tubes and pumps are made. The pith is an excellent substitute for cork. From the stem a white liquid similar to the milk of the coconut, and a flour resembling maize may be extracted. Of the straw, hats, baskets, brooms and mats are made. A considerable quantity of this straw is shipped to Europe, and a part of it returns to Brazil manufactured into hats. The straw is also used for thatching houses. Moreover, salt is extracted from it, and likewise an alkali used in the manufacture of common soap.

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FACTILE.

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FREDRIE: "Say, dad, why are there no marriages in heaven?" Hienpecker: "Because it's heaven."

THE SKIPPER: "You look terrible gloomy. What's got into you?" The Other: "Nothing that hasn't got out again."

He: "If she is a girl of ideas, as you say, why does she conceal them?" She: "She wants to get married."

DOCTOR: "Put out your tongue." Little Collis: "No fear! I did that to the teacher yesterday, and got a spanking."

TOMMY: "Mamma, why have you got papa's hair in a locket?" His Mother: "To remind me that he once had some, Tommy."

YOUNG WIFE: "You—you were intoxicated when you came in last night." Young Husband: "Only at the sight of your beauty."

MISS WAFFLES: "What's the longest time you ever got along without food?" Professor: "I once lived three days on my wife's cooking."

MRS. GADD: "How are you passing the time now, Mrs. Gabb?" Mrs. Gabb: "Oh, I'm dressing and undressing with the weather."

HIS DARLING SWEET: "What a sweet smile there is on baby's face, John!" Her Hubble: "Yes, he's probably dreaming that he's keeping me awake."

"I see villainy in your face," said the magistrate to the prisoner. "May it please your Honour," said the latter, "that is a personal reflection."

ENGLISHMAN (to native of Lynn): "I see this is only a shoe town. All the other places along this shore are resorts." Native (sarcastically): "So is this. A last resort."

YOUTHFUL LOVER (dighing): "It is not good for man to live alone." The Lady: "Very true, and that is why it would be so much better for you to go and live with your mamma."

NOSCADDS: "I suppose we are both extravagant!" Mrs. Noscadds: "Oh, no! We merely have extravagant tastes. We haven't money enough to be extravagant."

MRS. BJENKS (severely): "There is absolutely no excuse for polygamy. One wife is enough for any man." Mr. Bjenks (softly): "Yes. One wife is too much for some men."

MRS. DE STYLE (first day on a farm): "Horror! Our host is going to eat dinner in his shirt sleeves." Mr. De Style (mopping his forehead): "Thank heaven! Then I can, too."

"My daughter isn't afraid of anything on earth." "How do you know that?" "I've seen her wake her husband out of his Sunday afternoon nap to give him her dressmaker's bill."

MAMMA: "Ethel, what do you mean by shouting in that disgraceful fashion! Look how quiet Willie is!" Ethel: "Of course he's quiet; that's our game. He's papa coming home late, and I'm you."

MRS. MATCHMAKER: "Mr. Wise, I take it from your interest in my daughter Pearl that you're a gem connoisseur." Mr. Wise: "It's due, madam, to my great admiration for mother of Pearl."

"Say, Jones, when are you going to send back the umbrella I lent you?" "Found it was mine, so kept it." "By Jove! thought it was Pugsley's, and have been dodging him for weeks."

"Mr. Higgs, can I get off this afternoon?" My grandmother is dead." "Yes, you may go; but tell your grandmother that she will imperil your financial welfare if she dies any more this summer."

SBY: "And to think you have forgotten that this is our anniversary day." He: "Why, you must be mistaken. We were married on the 12th." She: "Oh, I beg pardon. I was thinking of my first marriage."

GRADUATE OF ART ACADEMY: "My dear Mr. Fanny, give me your candid opinion of my wood nymphs." Harry Fanny: "They are perfect." Graduate: "Ah, thanks; I— Fanny: "One would think they were actually made of wood."

"MR. BRIEFER is an awfully nice man, mamma." "Is he?" "Yes. Out on the porch last night he said to sister Lou, 'Aren't you cold?' and then he wrapped the sleeve of his coat around her. Wasn't that thoughtful? And his arm was in it, too."

CHARLIE: "Don't you remember! It was that day you borrowed five shillings of me." Jack (hastily): "I don't recollect anything of the sort." Charlie: "But you paid it back next week." Jack: "Oh, yes; I remember that perfectly."

MR. MECKER stepped into the kitchen a moment to speak a word to the new girl. "Verena," he said, "when you bring the turkey to the table place it before Mrs. Mecker. She will tell you to take it to me, and you can do so. This will start things right, and you'll get along with Mrs. Mecker without any trouble."

MR. D. SINKER (on being introduced to Adored One's Mother): "Pardon me, madam, but have we not met before? Your face seems strangely familiar." Adored One's Mother: "Yes; I am the woman who stood up before you for a quarter of an hour in an omnibus the other day while you sat reading a paper."

YOUNG LADY: "I can only be a sister to you—no more." He: "Thanks. That is very good of you. Have you spoken to your mother of it yet?" Young Lady: "Of what?" He: "My adoption!"

FRANTIC WOMAN: "Oh, sir, my husband returned to our room after we had fled!" Fireman: "Do you think he's in danger?" Woman: "He may be. Please go to him and tell him not to forget my diamonds!"

FAIR MAIDEN (a summer boarder): "How savagely that cow looks at me." Farmer Hayseed: "It's your red parasol, marm." Fair Maiden: "Dear me! I knew it was a little out of fashion, but I didn't suppose a country cow would notice it."

"It's no use," exclaimed Willis Washington, "I never can learn to say the right thing at the right time. I told Miss Silimmies that her eyes shone on me like the stars above." "That's old, but pretty," answered Miss Gaysane. "Yes. But she is one of those remarkably tall girls who resent any reference to their height."

"Why is it, Jack—I mean Mr. Buchanan—" she asked, "that you have never married?" "Well," he replied, "I have always felt that I was not good enough for any girl that I would want to be my wife." She had intended to land him, but after thinking the matter over for a few seconds she decided that there was really nothing farther to be said on the subject.

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SOCIETY.

THE Princess of Wales is expected to stay in Denmark until the third week in October.

THE Princess of Wales has now held her title for a longer period than any of her predecessors, her nearest opponent having been Augusta, the daughter of George II., who was Princess of Wales for thirty-five years.

TAN Duchess of Albany and her children are to visit their relatives at Bentheim, Arolsen, Newied, and Darmstadt before proceeding to Stuttgart for the winter. They will spend a week at Friedrichshof, near Homburg, with the the Empress Frederick.

PRINCESS HENRY OF BATTENBERG is at present concerned about her eldest son's career. Prince Alexander is with the Queen and Court on his holidays. If he should wish to join the Navy he will go to a Naval School, if not, he is to go to Eton when the College opens again. Should his present desire for a sailor's life be granted he will join the *Britannia* training ship at Dartmouth.

THE Queen has never worn her state crown since the Coronation, now more than sixty years ago. Like the set of the Crown jewels, it is kept in the Tower of London, where it is most carefully guarded. As it contains 2783 diamonds, 277 pearls, 16 sapphires, 11 emeralds, and 4 rubies, it is worth careful guarding.

THE youthful King of Spain is brought up strictly in accordance with the laws of hygiene, and hopes are entertained that by and-by he will completely outgrow the delicacy of constitution from which he has hitherto suffered. His amusements are like those of most boys of his age. One of his hobbies is gardening, and he has a pronounced liking for roses, enjoying experiments for the purpose of modifying their colour and perfume. The King usually rises at seven or eight o'clock, and begins his Latin lessons at ten, afterwards taking his "lesson of religion." But before studies of any kind he goes to Mass every day with the Queen-Regent in the private chapel of the Palace.

THE Duke and Duchess of Coburg made a very brief stay this year at Reinhardtsbrunn, their beautiful domain in the Thuringian Forest, near Friedrichroda, as they are said to have taken a great dislike to the place. It was the favourite country residence of their son, who greatly enjoyed his summers there, so that the place has now very sad associations. The Duke will spend the early autumn at Hinter-See, his romantic domain in the Tyrol; while the Duchess and Princess Beatrice have gone to Busia for several weeks, and will afterwards pay a long visit to the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Rumania at their country seat near Bacharest.

THE Prince of Wales is to arrive at Duntreath Castle, Sutherlandshire, on a visit to Sir Archibald and Lady Edmonstone, on Monday, October 2nd, from Balmoral. The Prince will travel by the ordinary express from Ballater to Sutherland, and thence by special train over the Forth and Clyde line to Blanehead, which is the nearest station to Duntreath. His Royal Highness is to stay at the Castle until Thursday night, when he will proceed by special train from Blanehead to Glasgow, and thence to London by the ordinary night express. Duntreath, which is in a picturesque lowland country near the Campsie Hills, is a fine old house, part of which dates from the fifteenth century, and it has nice gardens and well-wooded parks. There is excellent shooting over the estate.

ALL manner of rumours are afloat respecting the movements of the Tsar and Tsaritz, who are certainly going to Hesse, and may possibly come to England. The Queen is exceedingly anxious that they should do so. The Tsaritz is known to look forward with the greatest eagerness to her next visit; so in all probability, unless it be true that the Tsar's health is really so unsatisfactory that he will undergo a course of treatment at a certain German "cure," the Imperial couple will journey to Balmoral later in the year. The attitude of some of the Russian people towards the Tsaritz is causing the Queen the deepest anxiety.

STATISTICS.

ONE-THIRD of the people who go mad are said to recover their senses.

IN Norway the average length of life is greater than in any other country on the globe.

THREE thousand women spend their lives in driving and steering the canal-boats in southern and midland England.

MORE than 12,000,000 acres of the Sahara Desert have been made useful for raising crops with the aid of artesian wells.

GEMS.

THE reflection of light remains light, even when it is troubled. We may not see the shape of our star when the ripples shake it, but its colour and radiance are always there.

OUR characters are formed and sustained by ourselves and by our own actions and purposes, and not by others. Calumniators may usually be trusted to time and the slow but steady justice of public opinion.

HOW fine a thing it would be if all the faculties of the mind could be trained for the battle of life as a modern nation makes every man a soldier. But so few of our faculties are of a truly military turn, and these wax indolent and unwary from disuse, like troops during long times of peace.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CHICKEN TURN OVERS.—Mince fine some cold, cooked chicken, moisten well with good chicken gravy, and season well with salt, pepper and a little mace. Roll out some short pie-crust, and cut in rounds as large as a saucer. Wet the edges with cold water, place one large spoonful of the meat dotted with butter on one half of the round, fold over the other half, turning up the edges a little and pinching them well together. Bake in the oven, or fry in deep fat.

SCOTCH EGGS.—Ingredients: Eight eggs (hard-boiled), one pound of sausage, breadcrumbs, a little flour, one raw egg. First hard-boil the eggs. They will require boiling for quite fifteen minutes. Next shell them and place them in cold water for a few minutes. Skin the sausage, dip each egg in flour, then coat it over with a thin layer of sausage-meat, taking care to keep the shape of the egg. Next beat up the raw egg on a plate, brush some of it over each of the eggs you have just coated with meat; then roll them in crumbs. Have ready a pan of boiling fat, and fry them a pretty golden brown; then drain them on paper. Eat each egg neatly in half. Place each half on a neat piece of fried bread or toast.

CUCUMBER PICKLES.—For three hundred small cucumbers make a brine with cold water to cover them, and strong enough to float an egg. Bring this to the boiling-point, or, better still, boil a few minutes, and skim. Now pour over the pickles, and let them stand in a cool place for twenty-four hours. Drain off the brine and wipe dry. Heat to boiling sufficient cider vinegar to cover the pickles, and add one tablespoonful powdered alum; pour over the pickles, and let them stand twenty-four hours, then drain them, and put them into the following preparation:—Enough cider vinegar to cover, two green peppers, one pint brown sugar, one gill mustard, one ounce ginger root, one half-tablespoonful each of cloves, cinnamon, allspice, and celery-seed, poured over the pickles boiling hot. Add a few pieces horse-radish root. When cold, cover with a plate to keep the pickles from rising above the vinegar, cover the jar (which should be of earthenware), and keep in a cool, dark place. The same directions may be followed, without the spices, if preferred.

MISCELLANEOUS.

TWENTY years ago there was scarcely a mile of good waggon road in Egypt. During the last six years more than 1,000 miles of fine roads have been constructed.

A BIBLE with celluloid covers has been introduced in a New York police-court, and every time the Book is kissed a policeman removes with a wet sponge all possible disease germs.

BEFORE beginning to hatch, a pigeon lays two eggs, and they invariably produce a male and a female. Experiments have demonstrated that the egg first laid produces a male.

IN Bielefeld, Germany, there is a colony of epileptics, numbering about 1,500. The colony was established in 1868, and patients from all parts of the world go there for treatment.

AMONG the Sultan's gold plate there are dishes of solid gold of extraordinary size, and there are plates, cups and saucers, tarsens and pitchers, massive and heavy, made of the same precious metal.

A CHEMIST of Bavaria has prepared a fluid that has the power when injected into the tissue of a plant near its roots of anesthetizing the plant—not destroying it, but temporarily suspending its vitality.

BEFORE the Revolution in France it was customary, when a gentleman was invited out to dinner, for him to send his servant with a knife, fork, and spoon; or, if he had no servants, he carried them with him in his vest-pocket.

IT is curious to notice that wood tar is prepared just as it was in the fourth century B.C. A bank is chosen and a hole dug into which the wood is placed, covered with turf. A fire is lighted underneath, and the tar slowly drips into the barrels placed to receive it.

WAR correspondents were employed as far back as the time of Edward II. Scribes, specially commissioned, were sent up with the English army which invaded Scotland at that time. But, incredible as it may sound, not one of the London newspapers was specially represented at the Battle of Waterloo.

IN China carrier pigeons are protected from birds of prey by an ingenious little apparatus consisting of bamboo tubes fastened to the birds' bodies with thread passed beneath the wings. As the pigeon flies, the action of the air passing through the tubes produces a shrill whistling sound, which keeps the birds of prey at a distance.

AMONG the curious inhabitants of Australia are a species of termites called the "meridian ants," because they invariably construct their long, narrow mounds so that the principal axis of the dwelling runs exactly north and south. These mounds, when viewed end on, show a remarkable resemblance to a many-spined cathedral.

A NOVEL way of illuminating a railway tunnel has been devised in Paris. Reflectors throw the light from many electric lamps sixteen feet above the rails to the sides of the tunnel, where it is again reflected by burnished tin, a soft and agreeable light. The trains automatically turn the current on and off in entering and leaving the tunnel.

IN Fonda, one of the Shetland Islands, the natives make a business of rearing skau gulls in order to rid the island of the eagles that congregate there and commit many depredations. The magnificent red sandstone cliffs that skirt the north-western coast became a favourite haunt of the eagles, and in this inaccessible spot they increased so rapidly that they became a terror to the simple people—farmers and fishermen—who dwell on this isolated spot. The skau gulls are also strong and fierce, and the inveterate foe of the eagle. In battle it is the gulls who are always victorious, and so the inhabitants of Fonda hit upon the novel plan of feeding and caring for the skau gulls, which, though formidable to their feathered enemies, are very peaceful and docile when brought in contact with man.

We beg to inform our Friends we have secured a

SPLENDID SERIAL STORY

ENTITLED:

YOUNG AND SO FAIR.

The Opening Chapters will appear Next Week.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

C. K.—Write to the War Office.
CECIL.—Cost cannot be estimated.
ALF.—You have been misinformed.
LEONARD.—Inquire at Inland Revenue Office.
A. R.—There is no general delivery on Sunday.
V. L.—The exact value has never been made public.
WORRIED.—He cannot prevent you from using either name.
VAL.—The publication of the bans is considered sufficient notice.
C. S.—There is no legal barrier to the marriage of first or second cousins.
OLD READER.—You will find several addresses in the London Directory.
A. R.—You had better continue the instalments or you will be sold up.
INDIGNANT.—You can sue your neighbour for the value of birds killed by his cat.
VERA.—Get some friend who is acquainted with the language to make a selection for you.
PETE.—Acts of Parliament do not apply to the Isle of Man unless it is expressly mentioned.
CARL.—A foreigner who has been resident in England for five years may apply for naturalisation.
R. S.—You cannot do better than act on your solicitor's advice; our counsel would be to let matters rest.
PHYLLIS.—Hang a small bag of sulphur in the cage. This will not harm the bird, but it will keep away the vermin.
JACK.—The mates take charge of the ship, each in his turn; the captain is supposed to be always on duty; he does not take a watch.
IDA.—We are afraid we cannot give you the recipe you require. You would more easily obtain such information from friends in the trade.
CONSTANT READER.—It is absolutely necessary to have license from Inland Revenue Commissioners before you can sell postage stamps; security demanded.
QUEEN MAE.—Your father should talk to him, and pretty plainly. It is unmanly on his part to go dangleing after a girl without meaning anything by it.
A. L.—Apply to some ship owner or shipping agent. Unless you have had considerable experience you are not likely to obtain employment in the great lines.
MADLINE.—Women, young and old, as a rule, should avoid being drawn into a sentimental correspondence with those of the other sex with whom they are not related.
BOOK LOVER.—Bindings that have become mildewed may be cleaned by rubbing with a very little ammonia. They must be rubbed immediately after with a clean duster till quite dry.
REGULAR READER.—There is no county of Wessex in modern England. The name is sometimes used to denote the Western counties included in one of the divisions of the Heptarchy.
AGGIE.—Unmarried women do not have cards of their own unless they live away from home, are engaged in work of some sort, or are of an age that entitles them to be independent of home ties.
INTERESTED.—Small-pox is said to have been introduced into Europe by the Saracens from the East. Many attempts have been made to remove the "plague," but without practical success.
GENTLE.—Put the gloves on your hands, and wash them as if you were washing your hands, in some spirits of turpentine until quite clean; then hang them up in a warm place, or where there is a current of air, and all smell of the turpentine will be removed.

DISTRACTED.—When a young girl refuses to marry a lover, and can give no substantial reason for her refusal, it is clear her affection for him has never been strong—nothing beyond mere friendship.

LOVE.—If one wishes to make a wedding gift that has no particular money value, but simply expresses the kindly remembrance of the giver, a pretty sachet will be acceptable, as they are in fashion, and one can always find a place for one.

KITTY.—There would be no harm in just stopping to say a few words, or even in letting him walk a little way with you; but you should not encourage him to make a practice of it unless you are sure your mother would approve.

GRACE.—If he is engaged to you he has no right to pay marked attentions to any other young lady, whether in your presence or out of it. Perhaps his attention means nothing but what is demanded by the ordinary usage of society.

IN THE ORIENT.

She lay in languor on her soft divan,
 Rich rugs around her;
 A peri—in what Heaven had the Swart Kahn
 And turbaned, found her.

Rich silks and webs from countless English looms
 Draped limbs most gracious;
 Slaves filled with many delicate perfumes
 Her chambers spacious.

Her taper finger-tips were henna-stained;
 Kohl tinged eyes lustrous;
 From unguent's sweet her sweeter body gained
 Fresh charms relations.

She used to lift her nargile's amber tip
 With rosy fingers,
 Or raise cool sherbet to her scarlet lip,
 Where love-dew lingered.

Chased, precious vessels held the sweetmeats rare
 That often cloyed her;
 Gem-handled feathers fanned the fragrant air,
 When heat annoyed her.

She seldom spoke; but when her lips she took,
 And softly thrummed it,
 She caught the bulbul's note, heard in some nook,
 And sweetly hummed it.

Perchance, grown tired at length—'tis woman's way—
 She fumed and wrangled;
 Whereat her tyrant lord did curtsy say:
 "Let her be strangled."

LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—It is not proper that she should make an exhibition of the feeling. By seeming to avoid him, he may be roused to speak out, as you wish him to do. Some men can only be spirited when their vanity is alarmed, and that a woman knows well how to wound.

KATHLEEN.—In a general way convent and nunnery are alternative names for one institution; but strictly speaking, nunnery is properly applied to a place in which only women reside under vows of chastity, while in a convent there may be both men and women, and none of the latter under nun's vows at all.

N. S.—If not very dirty you might rub them lightly over with a camellia leather damped with soap suds, but it must be quickly done and then well rubbed up; we would be inclined to try ammonia and water mixed, and with that give them a light rub over, and then rub dry.

QUEEN.—Basta is the name given to the practice indulged in by the Spaniards, and the inhabitants of hot climates generally, of sleeping two or three hours in the middle of the day when the heat is too oppressive to admit of their going from home. 2. To die intimate means to die without having made a will.

L. K.—First close the register of the grate, and close windows and all openings by stuffing in paper. Next have a metal article—an old frying-pan will do—heated red hot, and an iron pot placed in the centre of the room. On this put the red hot pan, and fling on it one or two rolls of brimstone. Then retreat and close the door, filling up any openings, keyhole, &c. In twenty-four hours no germ of life will remain in the room.

R. G.—The sign of the three balls used by pawn-brokers was originally taken from the Italian bankers, generally called Lombards, who first opened shops in England for the relief of the temporary distress. The greatest of the Lombards was the princely house of the Medici of Florence. They wore pills on their shield, and those pills, as usual, were gilded in allusion to the professional origin of the house from which the name of Medici was derived. Their agents in England and elsewhere adopted their armorial bearings as a sign, and others followed the example.

HOUSEWORK.—If the stains were made by grease, spread damp whiting or chloride of lime on them. Let it remain for several hours, and then wash off. Washing-soda dissolved in hot water, mixed with enough whiting to form a paste, and left on the stains for several hours, is also a good remedy. Sometimes the stains are caused by rust or ink. A solution of nitric acid and water removes either of these. One part nitric acid to twenty-five parts water is the right proportion. Apply it to the spots only, and rinse them immediately afterwards with ammonia and water, or the acid will injure the marble.

J. W.—Tear up the leaves quickly. Do not crush them by cutting them. Pour out three tablespoonfuls of olive oil for a quart bowl of salad leaves. Stir into the oil a tablespoonful of salt, half a tablespoonful of pepper, and a spoonful of onion juice. Toss the salad leaves repeatedly in this mixture. Add after this a liberal spoonful of excellent vinegar and toss the salad again and again. Let the bowl and leaves be ice-cold, and make the salad at the table, so that there will be no delay in serving it before the leaves become dank and moist with the dressing. It must be served crisp. Onion juice is obtained by pressing the out surface of a white onion on a coarse grater—the juice readily runs if pressure is used.

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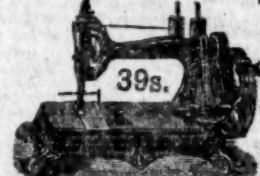
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